Title An appreciative inquiry into leadership sense-making and possibilities:

A story of values in action

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An appreciative inquiry into leadership sense-making and possibilities

A story of values in action

By

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University of Bedfordshire

Man knows himself only to the extent that he knows the world; he becomes aware of himself only within the world, and aware of the world only within himself. Every new object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ of perception in us.

Goethe

Abstract

The first question you might ask yourself when you start reading this thesis could possibly be: what is it that makes this research important, interesting, and worth reading? The answer could only be found in the eyes of the beholder and when you join in on the journey you will discover your own meaning.

My wish is to contribute with views and a space for reflection that can inspire leaders to look at and act on possibilities within leadership. In many ways this research might challenge traditional ways of thinking and doing research with its aim to contribute with the uniqueness of how sense-making can be developed through the perspective of systemic practice research. In systemic practice research my own practice and development becomes very important. This includes how I understand and interpret issues related to the research question and how my understanding emerges during the research process. Ways to develop systemic practice in general for the future also becomes important.

The thesis explores stories leaders tell about how they make sense of leadership and possibilities they see. This also includes me and how I have made sense. Systemic practice could be described as a reflexive and reflecting practice. This means that I will share my own reflections through the whole thesis. My learnings from this research journey could also be seen as emerging through the reflections I have made during the process.

The method is inspired by systemic and social constructionist perspectives related to practice research and also grounded theory. The sense I have made and express in this thesis is inevitably intertwined with experiences from past and present but also with hopes for the future, issues I would like to address for the future. The learning is partly influenced by interviews with leaders from different fields. Their sense-making has been summarised in themes that are explored and connected with and complemented with theoretical perspectives.

The thesis highlights leaders' personal and professional development as intertwined in an infinite process. The research also casts light on exploring aspects connected to values and ethics. From this journey a conceptualising of a leadership relational ethical compass and

an organisational relational ethical compass has been developed. It shows that if we are grounded in values we also can be guided by these values in our leadership. But our values also need to be transformed in a meaningful and useful way to our employees and in relation to the mission we have.

Leadership possibilities that arise could be seen as the aesthetics of leadership and how leadership is noticed and experienced. Often, small actions make a huge difference; how we think, communicate, and the words we use all create worlds and invite people into different patterns and meaning making conversations that are more or less helpful. The thesis highlights the importance of being comfortable with oneself and the mission as a leader. The thesis pays interest to how leaders' self-development is intertwined with the potential of the organisation. Leaders can always increase their ability to interact with others in a meaningful and constructive way. This also shows that the mind-set we have as leaders plays an important role in how we experience our mission and the possibilities we see.

The thesis is built on the idea of different domains. The introduction and methodology part represents what we can call the production domain. After this you will be invited to my personal domain and stories from my life that has influenced my sense-making. The next part will show some of the results and reflections that have arisen from interviews and will from this view take part of the production domain combined with reflections. The last chapter could be seen as my reflexive domain; how I have interwoven learning from the whole and come to certain hypotheses. The aesthetical domain could be seen as the overall how; how I have put it all together, the language and approach I have used, and how I have lived my values.

This thesis and the research could also be seen as built on four parts:

- My professional development which is my systemic leadership practice
- Developing systemic leadership practice in general
- Focus on conducting systemic practice research which could be seen as in its birth
- Interviews with leaders and connection to their understanding to increase aspects of leadership, sense-making and possibilities.

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Gratitude

Gratitude to influential people and contexts

Life has given me a lot of learning and through the meetings with other people my life has become enriched and new worlds of understanding have grown. Appreciative and social constructionist perspectives have also contributed to new views and exciting metaphors that have enriched my personal and professional life. The perspectives, theories and methods have invited me into a curious mind and to reflect which has increased my understanding of myself and others. I am also influenced by, for me, very important people. In 2004 I started the Masters programme in systemic practice with the Kensington Consultation Centre Foundation (KCCF) and Peter Lang as main teacher. When I first met Peter, several years earlier at a conference with Elspeth McAdam, I became very much inspired and I wanted to develop the way I could work and live my values in the similar way that I experienced they did. Enrolling in the Masters programme was one way to move on with this journey.

I have been very much inspired by Elspeth's and Peter's, from my view, natural way of living their values; their wisdom and creativity. Peter and Elspeth have influenced me to look at my profession and life with eyes of wonder and their friendship, support and creative minds have invited me into wonderful life journeys and new worlds.

Since I started this research journey I have been four times to Tanzania and worked with Elspeth and her brother Keith McAdam in a change agent programme. A programme conducted in the context of a research project run by Harvard University (Boston, USA) and Muhimbili University (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania). The aim has been to develop appreciative, systemic and strengths based approaches in relation to HIV prevention and related issues. To meet people in Tanzania, sisters and brothers living with HIV, experiencing their potential to lead change and working together with them toward the future they would like to see has given my life meaning beyond my imagination. To collaborate with Keith, Elspeth and other colleagues all over the world has opened up new inspiring collaborative aspects. To be a part of a team led by Keith's wisdom, genuine wish to make a difference to people

in the world combined with his curious and humble approach has been extraordinary and very inspiring.

I am grateful to all the wonderful colleagues I have had during the years I worked as a manager. Their responses and engagement in the work we did greatly influenced the passion and hope I felt and the possibilities I saw. I am also grateful for the trust all the clients and customers have shown over the years and their generosity to let me and my colleagues become companions.

The conversations I have had and have with people I have met and meet in different contexts widen and increase my world which also leads me to new exciting experiences of life.

It is not possible to mention everyone who has been particularly important for me in enabling my professional and personal development during my time as a leader, consultant and this research journey but a couple of people who first come to mind are; Toini with her ability to listen and who has given me her humble support when life has been challenging, she has given me hope and shared my joy, Mia H who believed in me, Mia L, who gave me her trust and friendship, Lisbeth who supported me and invited me into inspiring conversations. I also think about Annelie who joined with a similar dream and with her belief in people, Frida with her impressing energy and encouragement, Caroline who invited me into dreaming and friendship without borders, Lillemor who invites me into a humble curiosity toward reflecting on life in relationship to how leadership can bring future possibilities to the next generation, Birgitte my sister and philosophical friend, Linda with her presence and inner beauty and also Siv for her long and warm friendship. I will not forget Cherrie and Birgitte, my dear research friends, John Shotter who in many ways kept us going and Professor Ravi Kohli who with his personality and humbleness lightened up the research context in an inspiring way.

During the time of this research journey I have been able to meet a lot of wonderful people. I will never forget the participating leaders who generously contributed with their knowledge and also people in different contexts who I have been collaborating with professionally. The participants' wish to be a part of this journey and their contribution made the journey even more exciting, and the collaboration we had was very inspiring. The

wisdom they shared and the learning I have gained from our conversations will unfortunately not be possible to capture in full in this thesis.

Later in the research process I got to know Joseph who with his ‘small’ actions of support and encouragement has made a huge difference to me.

I also would like to give a huge thanks to my supervisor, Professor Michael Preston-Shoot who with his flexibility has made it possible for me to have supervision both in England and Sweden. His research knowledge is uniquely companioned by his ability to use metaphors in conversations; he has used different images that have inspired my writing a lot but also my own development as a researcher.

I am grateful to all my friends who have had patience with me when work and research has occupied me and limited my possibilities to meet; you are all in my heart.

I also would like to show my gratitude to my parents who have brought important values into my life and encouraged my writing and this journey. To get support from them when I decided to end my work as a manager to be able to give this thesis more focus has meant a lot to me.

The conversations I have had during the years with my husband, his support, patience and ability to listen has been very important to me. He has shown considerable curiosity and trust which has encouraged me to think further and to also challenge my thoughts. He has a natural appreciative approach and wisdom.

It is not possible to show gratitude without mentioning my sons, Markus and Simon. During these years they have become young men. There are a lot of things that could have been if I had not been occupied by this research. Markus and Simon have had a mother who has been deeply buried in her writing and her profession and they have shown incredible acceptance and great patience with me. They have lightened up my life and they give my life important meaning and hope for the future. It is exciting to follow their development and to be able to share and take part in their wise thoughts and growing.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to leaders of the future; all leaders who would like to contribute to the growth of other people, leaders who aim at developing their curious minds and to explore and realise people's infinite potential, including their own.

I also dedicate this thesis to my sons Markus and Simon. They are the future and I am happy to have had and to have the possibility to follow parts of their life journey. I am proud to be their mother and I know that they already do and that they will influence the world in great ways with their curiosity, creativity and humbleness.

I dedicate this thesis to everyone who would like to look at leadership and organisations with the eyes of wonder, 'friends' that I have met and 'friends' that I have not yet met, people who are, just as me, excited about what we can become and create together.

Part one –

Pre understanding and setting the context

Introducing the context

The context of Systemic practice research

This research has been done in the context of being a systemic practice research (Barge, 2006; Doctorate Handbook, 2008) and this has had natural consequences for how the research has been done and also on how this thesis has been constructed. To be able to understand how the research has been conducted and how this thesis has been structured and emerged I would like you to take a first glimpse of how I understand my context of being a researcher within this practice.

Pearce & Walters (1996) share an old joke about two types of people in the world: Those who divide everyone else into two types and those who do not. They write further that the etymological root of "science" is "sci" which means to divide; it is the same root as in schism and schizophrenic. The root of "system" on the other hand is "syn" and "histemein" which means to put together. Within most of the traditional and intellectual movement of science, the dividing aspects would be high-lighted and the dividing aspects would encourage us as researchers to cut things apart in their smallest components. It is based on the belief that if you understand the parts, you understand what basic, fundamental is or elemental (Pearce & Walters, 1996). On the other hand, Pearce and Walters describe the intellectual movement of "systemic thinking" as putting things together and studying how they are related.

Systemic foregrounds "connections" rather than differences, pattern rather than essence, and co evolutionary processes rather than causal relations (Barge, 2006; Pearce & Walters, 1996). In the view of being a systemic practice research, I will therefore explore my own practice, mind-set and actions and the "theory" will emerge within an intertwined process between me and the data. Patterns and connections between my practice and the research will be in foreground. It could be seen as a co evolutionary process where my ability to reflect and develop my own practice as researcher, writer, leader, consultant, and also systemic practice in general, becomes intertwined and important for the whole. The reflecting and reflexive practice in this research (Oliver, 2005; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2001) becomes an important part and will be shown in maybe not as

traditional writing as most researchers and readers are used to. I will to a high degree share my reflections and stories. I have also included a part in which I will share some of my own experiences from life and of how my understanding has been developed. This part becomes one way to also share my pre understanding.

Barge (2006) describes that research within systemic practice will highlight and foreground reflexivity. It aims at containing the practice in question which shows within itself moments of critical reflection, for the research to be enriched by reflexive storying. This will include the influence of me as a researcher; to make transparent the role of myself as researcher, my inner and outer dialogue, my own stories in relation to the research topic and where possible, to include reflexive responses.

Systemic practice research from Barge´s view involves a reflexive intertwining of both research activities and professional activities with professional moments and research moments each informing and forming the other. As the details of the different moments are spelt out, the non-separable character of the different aspects of their nature becomes apparent: the doing, the commentary, the sharing, the elaborating, the critiquing, the researching, the communicating of the results, the relating of the business activity to the other crafts and practices surrounding it (Barge, 2006).

My reflexive approach and the reflections I make show some of my emerging knowledge and invite a never ending process of learning. The reflections could also be seen as patterns that will connect different views and themes with each other to become the whole. The whole will show how I as a researcher and practitioner find “data” relevant to my own systemic practice and to systemic practice for the future. Like Barge (2006) expresses it, the whole will be a non-separable character of different aspects.

Different parts of the research will create the whole of the thesis and of how I have lived my values during this process. It will be shown by the way I write and how I have interpreted philosophical assumptions with the aim to also contribute to developing systemic practice in general.

A systemic practice research perspective will from the view above benefit from being understood from a holistic perspective of the whole. This is similar to eastern philosophy

which values wholeness of experience and a holistic perspective (Capra, 1991). Paradigm is known by its worldview (Dahlberg et al., 2001). This thesis will show a glimpse of my wholeness of experience and worldview. My worldview is made up by a collection of general assumptions about the part of the world in which I as the discipline scientist am engaged in researching.

A systemic approach with constructionist influences (Barge, 2006) has emerged over the last 20 years within European management studies. It differs from other postmodern and critical management approaches (Boje, Gephart & Thatchenkery, 1996) and creates a unique set of ideas, methods and techniques that inform managerial practice. Similarities can be found in qualitative research traditions (Silverman, 2005; Quinn Patton, 2000) and in family therapy (Draper & Dallos, 2010) and its research field. But as Barge (2006) describes it, management research has a different set of affordances and constraints than the field of family therapy. We will also from Barge´s view end up in an individual translation of what we consider to be a systemic constructionist approach to management research.

To better be able to understand the context of being a systemic managerial practice research it might be helpful to make distinction between the doing of a professional doctorate and its requirements and the writing up of the thesis. A systemic practice research can never be separated from the being. These aspects will inevitably influence how the research has been conducted and how the thesis has been written. A systemic practice research values that I as a research practitioner get the possibility for a transformation of my practices of living at the same time as theory and practice within the field will be developed.

No truth will be claimed and my research and this thesis take the stance that knowledge is always evolving through our meaning making processes. This perspective also in a natural way would like to invite the reader into a reflective and reflexive process.

Reading advice and structure of the thesis

The perspective of acknowledging the view that knowledge will always be emerging (Mills, 2013), will challenge the traditional structure of a thesis. To acknowledge that my

professional and personal lives will inevitably be intertwined with the research process (Barge, 2006; Cronen, 1995) has challenged the structure even more. My aim has been to create a structure for this thesis that can be easy to read and understand and at the same time live systemic emerging reflexive practice.

I have made a choice to write this thesis inspired by storytelling to enable the process of emergence to come alive. Doing research could not in this case be separated from writing the thesis. The writing has been a long, reflective and important process in the research and exploration and emergence of my own sense making. To enable this emergence my writing style might be experienced as more personal than traditional research.

The thesis is organised in the following parts, relating to the different parts of this research journey:

The first part focuses on the 'before'; my pre-understanding, sense-making and inspiration that influenced me to think the way I did when I approached the research question. This part will set the scene and clarify the context. It also includes preparations for the research, methodological influences, method discussions and a first conversation about leadership based on a literature review.

The second part focuses on 'during' in the sense that it describes how conversations that I have had with other leaders during this process have contributed to this research. It shows parts of findings and reflections from a study done with 12 leaders. This part consists of a combination of stories from the leaders, my own reflections, and also a connection to literature that I have found particularly responds to their stories and my reflections. This second part will also show how a theoretical approach within a systemic, social constructionist leadership field has been particularly helpful to me during this process, supporting my learning and reflexive process.

The third part deals with the 'after' and shows where I personally ended up in relation to the research question. This part illustrates how I relate this research journey to my systemic practice and what has struck me during this journey as particularly meaningful, my emerged understanding. This part contains a deepened literature review within the field of practice, my particular contribution to the field with a developed discussion about ethics,

values in action and the idea of an ethical relational compass to guide leaders, a compass with the aim to support leader reflecting and reflexive thinking and being in relationships. This is a compass that aims at supporting leaders in how they can make sense of their possibilities to support their organisations to work optimally

The thesis could also be seen as working with different layers or domains. It shows a personal domain from which I share my own journey and experiences. The production domain shows research methodology, theory, and what I have done/produced. The domain that involves all the other domains is what I would describe as my reflexive domain. This domain takes the production and my personal experiences into a reflexive process with the aim to increase understanding further and invite further reflections. Finally, the aesthetical domain could be seen as the overall 'how'; how I have put it all together, the language and approach I have used, and how I have lived my values.

I have made a choice to share the literature review divided in different parts relating to the emerging research process and thesis. In the beginning, 'before', I will share literature which will represent my pre understanding. These aspects will connect to methodologies which also show my philosophical stance and views that in high degree influence how I also understand leadership. It will also show literature research of general aspects related to leadership and to lead. Connected to the part of 'during', references have been made related to what has directly responded to me based on these interviews. In the last chapter, the 'after', a literature review within the field of systemic and social constructionist leadership will be shown and also development of theory related to my "conceptualised" hypothesis.

The research has been conducted based on different aspects, these are:

- My own professional leadership systemic practice development
- Systemic practice development in general
- Development of systemic practice research which could be seen as in its birth
- Interviews with leaders to complement own experiences and reflections
- Literature review

Welcome to share my research journey!

Mind-set and research

Looking with eyes of wonder

I stood in a dark and dirty toilet in New Delhi, a toilet consisting of just simple walls and holes in the ground. I was occupied by the thought of how awful this place was and I could hardly see in the dark. If I had not been supported by a woman who led the way with a candle, I would not have found my way in the darkness and a hole in the ground to use. But in that moment, I am ashamed to confess, I didn't really appreciate her support. Instead, my mind became occupied by how she could work in those circumstances and also bring her three small children into this environment, the smallest one just a baby hanging on her breast. It was dark and dirty and not a place you would like your children to be in. I felt very uncomfortable and couldn't hurry enough to get out.

Out in the sunshine again I took a deep breath. When I tried to look around, I became blinded by the first sight. I was dazzled by the light but also by the blue sky and the beauty of the historical buildings that surrounded me. At a second sight, when I had adapted my eyes to the sunshine I saw a lot of children hanging around, begging for money and looking for something to eat in the trash. Many of the children wore rags for clothes and they had wounds on their bodies. They were children who probably had no parents that took care of them. Children who with a high degree of certainty were abandoned, abused, hurt and exploited in ways we don't even want to think about. This sight gave me a new perspective on the woman at the toilet.

One of the things that struck me at that moment was that things are much more than we see at first sight. How easy it was for me to judge this woman and by this not seeing her good intentions and the values she carried out in her actions. She could be seen as a very brave woman who took action to be able to provide for her children. At first sight I saw humiliation and I made her a victim in my mind. On second thoughts, she turned out to be an incredible woman who actively lived her motherly values, a woman with dignity and showing a lot of care for her children by keeping them by her side. The things that I saw at first sight I didn't understand but I started to add assumptions. If I would have gone into the toilet once more with new understandings in my mind, I would have been acting differently.

I had not hurried the way I did and looked down to the ground. I would probably have said hi to the children, maybe tried to talk to them and I would have thanked the woman more properly and with eye contact. What difference would this have made to this woman and her children? Who had she and they become if I had done this?

The more I think about this woman I realise that she gave me a light in the dark, a light that encouraged me to look with the eyes of wonder. I realised that we can find the wonder and the sense of awe in the most strange and unfamiliar places.

The light of wonder reminds me of how my assumptions and mind-set influence how I look at people and situations, the difference in what I will see/notice/understand if I look with eyes of wonder instead of with critical eyes. If I look with eyes of wonder I will notice things that are not obvious at first sight, it will light up people's good intentions, values, hopes, and dreams; things that create meaning and good things in life.

The light of wonder also represents that we can never know other people's values and how they are lived without an honest curiosity to understand as much as we can from this person's specific view and context. This is also a state of wonder. People live their values to the extent they understand that they can and in relation to what is possible and experienced possible in their context.

The third thing is that the light of wonder highlights how easy it is that, if we experience something as uncomfortable for us, we lose our curiosity and very easily try to dismiss the distraction. When we feel uncomfortable we have a tendency to find causes for this outside ourselves. It is easy to forget that it is the actual perspective we take that makes us uncomfortable and not the person or event itself.

The light of wonder highlights the relative aspect and that there is no right or wrong; values are expressed and acted out in different shapes. To understand we have to appreciate the specific context that is surrounding the expression. With eyes of wonder we can become more aware of ourselves in an appreciative way, how come we think and act in specific ways. We can increase our understanding of others by adding new ways of looking and by viewing people's thoughts and actions from an appreciative perspective and with eyes of wonder. Maybe someone would argue; why should we understand and maybe also why

should we accept other people's ways of acting and strange cultures? This is not a discussion of accepting, some actions we morally never would or should accept but if we can understand without judgement, it is easier to approach the situation or other people's thoughts without getting into tense situations and questions about right or wrong. If we believe that we influence others by the way we approach them, we also open up for the wonder of how we create each other. The big question is how we would like others to experience themselves by the way we approach them and from how we interact with them.

Curiosity - a way to experience wonder

The first time I met the word wonder in a way that touched me was in conversations with Peter Lang, consultant in systemic, narrative, and appreciative approaches. During the years I have known Peter Lang and Elspeth McAdam, I have become fascinated by how they are able to use their perspective of looking with eyes of wonder in the most difficult situations. Their curious state of mind and genuine interest in how people make sense give people dignity and invite new conversations that also allow new stories to be told, stories that highlight good intentions and values which also allow change to take place in relation to what is desired.

Generally, the word wonder is used in many different ways. In this thesis I am using the word wonder as a state of mind that is influenced by genuine curiosity; to have a feeling of awe and astonishment in relatedness to what I/we experience and in relation to others' stories; both participants and authors that have inspired me along the way. The meaning of doubt that is also often used in connection with the word wonder could be related to doubt of my/our own first sight and assumptions, to be curious to explore more about what is behind the first sight.

van Manen (1986) writes that wonder is the heart of what it is to be human, it places us directly and transparently in the face of the world we live in with others. Wonder reveals things in a new light and tends to promote mindful and gentle regard for their inherent worth. Accordingly, to respond to others in a manner which somehow acknowledges the emergence of wonder should have an explicit place in any relations oriented toward the good of the other.

For me to look with eyes of wonder is a reminder to be curious. To look beyond our first sight and own understandings. Wonder also invites us into infinite learning from our surroundings, from other human beings but also from nature. When we look with our eyes of wonder we acknowledge that every person we meet has experiences, thoughts and ideas that we can learn from but also potentials that they yet don't know. I believe that if we meet other people with our eyes of wonder, being appreciative with curiosity, acknowledging them and giving them dignity, this will increase their possibilities of becoming the best version of them-selves and to get connected to their potentials.

Curiosity leads us into infinite learning. A little child doesn't explore things with a mind of 'I know this', he or she is driven by an eagerness to experience something, to learn new things about the world with curiosity and playfulness. Children look with eyes of wonder and they use all their senses to explore their surroundings. All of us probably have experiences of how we have learned when we have been curious about something we would like to learn more about.

Loewenstein (1994) writes that the earliest discussions of curiosity, predating the emergence of the field of psychology, were conducted by philosophers and religious thinkers and centred around the question of curiosity's moral status rather than its psychological underpinnings. First curiosity was seen as an intrinsically motivated desire for information. Cicero (1914) referred to curiosity as the passion for learning. Edelman (1997) in his turn shares a similar description and defines curiosity as a need, thirst or desire for knowledge. From this view the concept of curiosity will be central to motivation.

There is from the view of William James (1950) two kinds of curiosity. He emphasised a biological function of curiosity as a mechanism of instinct driven behaviour that serves in approaching new objects. James describes the second kind of curiosity as scientific curiosity and metaphysical wonder which once more moves us towards our philosophical brain and how it responses to inconsistency or a gap in its knowledge.

The focus for this thesis is how leaders make sense of their possibilities. Curiosity could be seen as one important part of developing leadership and research practice. Research could also be described in one way as organised curiosity.

Research journey and mind-set

During my research journey I have realised more than ever how much our mind-set and how we perceive the things we experience matters. It is not the view we experience; it is the view we take that makes us experience different things. I have been working for a long time as a leader and I am very interested in leadership and to learn more about this interactive phenomenon. To learn, I need to be curious and look at places I have not looked before and this also means exploring earlier experiences in new ways. The state of wonder is a state we can put ourselves into. The research journey itself is a way to put myself in a state of wonder in relatedness to the subject of the research.

My research journey started many years ago. Some questions that are related to this and that I would like to answer are: how did this journey come to mind, what was it that I wanted to explore, how did it start, how did I proceed and what did I discover?

A research friend of mine said that a research journey could be described like finding your way home and during this process you will open many doors, you will visit many rooms, some places will touch you and others just will pass by. My supervisor said to me that to get to know a city for real we also need to walk on the small streets and backyards. In many ways this journey became a way of exploring different backyards while finding my way home; a place where I felt comfortable in this big landscape of leadership and research related to my research question. But home is not a fixed place; home for me is a sphere where I have found out more about myself, what I value, and how I through my interactions with others can be coherent with these values and be a servant to others and in relation to goals in a meaningful way.

Some years ago, I met a man who introduced me to a new word that I had never heard of before, a word that has become an important metaphor for me in the field of sense-making, learning and growth. I don't even know if it is possible to translate the word correctly but the word that I have translated as 'verge zone' could be viewed as a metaphor. Let us call the man, who introduced me into the wonder of the verge zone, Mr T.

Mr T told me that there is a zone in nature called the verge zone and that this is a place where different kinds of terrain conditions meet each other. One example of this could be

where a field meets a forest. Mr T said that this verge zone is the place in nature where the greatest numbers of diverse species grow/live at the same place. In the verge zone, the zone where different conditions and terrain connect, the growth of variety is the highest.

I thought that this was a beautiful metaphor and I have been thinking of how it could be connected to us as humans and to our professions and this research. It is in the meeting between us things happen and our growth and wisdom increase. It is when we meet in our uniqueness and share meanings that the development is the greatest. If we all should be the same and think the same, the growth would be very limited. But we also need the variety to manage different conditions. The conclusion I draw from the verge zone is not just the obvious fact that we learn together and from each other, it is also the importance of exploring this zone and its space and what is happening there, between us. This research could be seen as highlighting different verge zones, borders, places where different terrains meet; my experiences, understanding, research terrains, the terrain of each participant in the study and the terrain of different authors and readers. It is in between these different terrains and in the verge zones that this thesis and its content have been developed, my sense-making has grown and readers' reflections will grow.

As has been described in the beginning of the thesis this is a systemic practice research which is highly connected with my own professional and personal development. My work as a leader, as a leader for leaders and my work as a consultant within leadership and organisational development has offered me infinite opportunities to reflect. My work influences how I look at life and my life outside work influences how I look upon my work. From this view the research process/journey became inextricably intertwined with my daily practice and living. The research also encouraged me to create a space for and to develop my reflective mind.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) highlight that everyone can create their own theory as long as it starts from reality, even ordinary mortals can generate creative input as scientific entrepreneurs; they do not have to act as verifying proletariat serving intellectual big business. Each one is the architect of her own theory. This is one way to describe my work with this thesis. The thesis shows my reality and understanding. From this view I am the architect of my own theory, an architect who also has been and continuously will be influenced by other authors' ideas and theories.

Words create worlds

Every word and response creates different meanings and outcomes. (Vygotsky, 1986)

It is through the words my own and others' meaning come to life. The way I picture and understand words colour this thesis but it will be in the eyes of the beholder that it will be understood. This research journey and my professional life in parallel have made me particularly curious about how we as individuals give different words meaning and how this meaning influences how we make sense.

Gergen, Schrader and Gergen (2009) write that we typically treat language as a picture of the world. The authors encourage us to think beyond that picture, to think again. They say that the words we use just like the names we give to each other are not static pictures of the world, with singular meanings but practical actions, they serve pragmatic functions. Words are also useful to us to carry out relations.

Wittgenstein (1953) suggested that we replace the image of words as pictures of the world with this image of a language game. Wittgenstein says that language is meant to serve for communication. He says that in the practice of language one calls out the words and others act on them. The way I understand this is that we have been socialised to learn how to respond with proper actions or answers in different situations.

From my understanding our communication is very complex and it is not just something that is happening in the moment. This is an interactive process influenced by history, earlier experiences and by future hopes, dreams and worries for everyone involved which leads to that we communicate from different positions and understandings. If the context is clear the possibility to understand each other tends to become more successful and we can also develop meaning together much easier.

Lang and McAdam (2012) write that in interaction with others there is often a belief that the others share the same cultural, political and moral beliefs as us. They say that if we treat them as if they were the same then misunderstandings are likely to occur. But on the other hand if we think about everyone as a foreigner or a stranger we can become more curious of their way of thinking and also become curious about what is created between us.

This appreciative and curious way of approaching others from my view also opens up the idea of always being beginners in understanding each other's language.

The value each one of us brings to a specific word, its use, and also connections to emotions is unique and can only be translated into general pictures. Each meeting and words used invites us to become curious about how others understand their words and worlds but also how they perceive the words we use and our world. We need to tread carefully and with great curiosity in each other's generalised pictures and as visitors in their life worlds that we only can get a glimpse of. Alex Kozulin (1986) revised and edited thoughts by Lev Vygotsky on the conception of word meaning as a unit of both a generalised thought and social interchange. If we acknowledge that words represent generalised meanings we also acknowledge that there are multiple meanings behind each word. Lang and McAdam (2000) also illustrated this in a seminar titled '*There is an ocean of meaning in a drop of grammar.'*

The way we generalise makes us experience things in different ways, and by the generalising process we also risk losing the different nuances and meanings.

The use of the word 'story' has a particular place of significance within a systemic orientation and Pearce (2008) says that our stories can never articulate the richness of the patterns that we live. Pearce writes that we in systemic practice are mindful about the stories we hear and we are interested in how they have been constructed and what possibilities for action they construct in organisational life. In examining and creating stories, a special interest is taken in the possibilities and constraints embedded in language. Pearce also highlights that the use of a word can be seen as a moral and political act in that the ways we use language shape possibilities for agency and contribution, enabling or disabling meaningful and purposeful participation.

I agree with Pearce, we have to be mindful about the stories we hear and curious about how they have been constructed, if they are helpful or if it could be helpful to explore other stories that can be supportive in our life and profession. I believe that it is easy to get trapped in dominant stories. I can experience that dominant stories could be very limiting and secured by high fences that decrease the possibility for other stories to be told. With this thesis and my work as a consultant I aim at exploring useful stories that can enable

people, communities and organisations to use their resources and potential in the best way, to live a good life and have the dream and/or goal in sight guided by helpful stories and conversations.

We have to be mindful about how we influence the way stories are told and how we retell these stories. The way we listen enables the storyteller to in different ways tell his or her story and the way words will be generalised. The story will be developed in a space of interaction between us. By the questions we ask we will influence how stories are told and how the storyteller will understand his or her own story and from this view him or herself. In this way, I as a researcher have a powerful influence over the stories and conversations I invite others into. There is always a risk that the person who answers our questions answers in a way that he or she thinks is proper to the situation and the 'language game' of the context.

To move into research in leadership and sense-making makes it important that I am aware of that I have my own generalised pictures and use my eyes of wonder to find new learning. I need to avoid and move beyond already fixed generalised pictures.

Research focus

This section described the aim and focus of my research as well as the research question as such.

Aim

The aim with my research has been to:

- Contribute with knowledge in the area of how leaders make sense of leadership. How leaders have created and create their understanding of leadership and what possibilities they experience they have to influence their organisations to work optimally and support people to give their best.
- To conduct research using systemic and social constructionist influences and practice and, as Michael Quinn Patton (2002) writes; focus on the fundamental question in social constructivism: How have people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, 'truths,' explanations, beliefs and worldview?
- Use questions inspired by Appreciative Inquiry that selectively seek to locate, highlight and illuminate the 'life giving forces' of the existence of leadership (Cooperrider *et al*., 2003), just as positive psychology studies focus on how good can be better, on the strength and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.
- To share ideas and reflections that can support and encourage leaders to become more aware of the importance of their actions, to see possibilities and to become inspired to develop their leadership further.
- Reflecting on and sharing my own sense-making connected to the research question.

My way to do this has been through:

- Exploring my own sense-making and view of systemic social constructionist leadership practice and leadership possibilities.
- Exploring other leaders' sense-making and what possibilities they see.
- Exploring ideas and thoughts by authors that have particularly resonated with me in relation to this thesis and the dominant patterns I have found.
- Summarising my learning and sense-making.

Focus

It has been a long journey to formulate a question that could guide me through this process, organise it, and give direction and coherence. The question has developed from my own experiences of leadership and curiosity to learn more but also from discussions with my supervisors and with Susan Lang who generously spent a couple of hours with me in the beginning of this process.

One driving force for this thesis was the wish to develop my own and others' knowledge about how it is possible for leaders to be a part of creating optimal and sustainable organisations. Optimal organisations could for this purpose be seen as organisations that efficiently and effectively drive their success toward their defined vision and that sustainably improve their performance. This is preferably achieved by a sense of being a context/system where people have the possibility to use and develop their skills and abilities in the best way according to the goal of the organisation. Organisations in which people experience themselves as resourceful and important, organisations where people can feel proud of what they are doing and what they belong to. This is the kind of organisation where people enjoy to work; people are motivated and look forward to doing the work they are responsible for. These are in my opinion organisations whose capability to create success is the greatest.

During the years, I have had a possibility to think about and reflect on how I have created and create my understanding and how my understanding influences my actions and interactions. I have become more aware of how my actions influence and can influence

others and I have increased my abilities to reflect and more actively learn from responses I get in response to my actions and approach. This learning has created a reflexive process that offers me lifelong learning. To explore my own understanding a bit further but also other leaders' sense-making has for me become an interesting field for learning.

There could have been multiple possible research questions and I made a choice that I hoped would interest many readers and leaders. A choice of a question that also would allow open-ended questions and encourage the participants' own understanding.

Another choice was how to frame the question in a way that could direct the conversation toward life-giving stories. I played with the word 'stories' because I thought that this could contribute to the perspective that there is no truth, allowing different stories. The choice of this word, story, also arose from my own wish to write the thesis more like a story of the research journey.

The word sense is described in the Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary (2000) as connected to feeling a sense of what is important, understanding about something (Hornby, 2000).

To have a focus on 'Stories of how leaders made sense' also includes my own sense-making. My own leadership development is an important part of this research.

When I created the research question I also made a choice to use the word leader. Leadership is referred to in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) as 'characteristics as going in front of a person and show the way or make them go in right direction' (Hornby, 2000).

Campbell (2003) describes leadership as the process by which managers throughout an organisation exert influence. This description from my view points out that leadership could be seen as how managers from their position approach, think, and act in relation to their organisation and the people of the organisation. From a systemic and social constructionist view the interaction between the leaders and people in the organisation becomes important.

The research question and its content

From the background above I made the choice to organise the project and give it direction and coherence through the following question:

What stories do leaders tell about how they have made/make sense of leadership and how it is possible for them to influence their organisations to work optimally?

The research will focus on leaders' sense-making of possibilities they see, the WHAT, and this will also be particularly shown in the part describing the leaders' understanding and my reflections related to WHAT in the last chapter. But the question also invites a focus on the HOW; how to do this, including how the leaders have made sense and how I have made sense of leadership and its possibilities. Experiences that they and I particularly think influence our understanding.

The view of the optimal organisation also invites the HOW in the way that it gave the interview context a direction, what we/the leaders are aiming at. Through inviting images of what it looks like when things are working well, it also gave me a possibility to get their view of what they would be aiming at with the possibilities they saw. At the same time I also hoped that they would thereby give themselves a clarified direction of how they would experience their organisations when things are working well, if they had not had time to think about this before. With the image in mind it is easier to backlight and explore how we will get there. This view enabled us to talk about how they as leaders could contribute to this goal.

Justifying the research

This research is in many ways related to my own practice but it is also a practice that many people are involved in and that many people are influenced by. I want to influence in a good way with my research and one important justification is that I have tried to do this.

I have not found anything particular written about leaders' own sense-making and how they make sense, arising from leaders' own stories and connected to systemic or social constructionist perspectives. As Barge (2006) writes there are only a few readings that address unique qualities of systemic constructionist research within managerial practice. Examples of authors that have approached this field are Barge (2006) and Pearce and Walters (1996)

- I have found a huge amount of books about leadership but most of them are written by consultants not from the perspective of the leader him- or her-self.
- Most books and leadership programmes that I have found are based on top down learning and quick fixes based on generalised pictures and with behaviouristic influences.
- By sharing thoughts arising from my own professional journey connected to other leaders' experiences makes this research unique.
- Based on many conversations with leaders I have experienced that it is not so common to talk about leadership when you have become a leader. This research is based on conversations with leaders with an aim to invite to a conversation and inner dialogue also while reading it.
- My experience is that systemic and social constructionist literature is often difficult to understand, at least from my view with English as my second language. I would like to offer a text that is easy to connect to and that gives direct connections to practice.
- I would like to give inspiration to what works well with stories that give hope and energy in relation to leadership and its possibilities.
- I would like to contribute with a space that enables reflection and that contributes to leaders' wish to look outside 'their own box' to become more curious about people's meaning-making processes and how we through meaningful interactions and conversations can create 'optimal organisations'.

- I also would like to contribute to professional pride and a view of leadership as craftsmanship. I would like to highlight what it is that makes a difference related to relational aspects.

The majority of research in systemic constructionist management has focused on how internal and external organisational consultants work with and shape managerial processes. More recently, a line of research has emerged that explores how managers use systemic constructionist ideas and practice in their working life (Barge, 2006; Barge & Oliver, 2003; Barge & Little, 2002). This research will focus on managers' experiences, experiences based on leadership practice, participants' and mine.

Another main justification I also have found during the research journey and that has influenced the whole research is in relation to ethical leadership; the importance and influences of values. I find it important to create more awareness about what motivates us as leaders and to take a more active approach toward how we would like to lead in the future in relation to our values.

Sense-making of the whole

For me as a researcher, 'sense-making' will be important in many ways and it influences the whole research project; the view I take, how I make sense, how the participants make sense, how the research makes sense and how I make sense of it all. The research and development of the thesis could be seen as a meaning-making process and it continues in the way the audience and examiners make sense of it.

I am oriented toward the momentary order of possibilities and on what is evolving in conversations while they proceed. From a systemic view, any act of participation in communication creates change in understanding. From this view change is inevitable - for me as a researcher as well as the participants.

Calás and Smircich (1992) speak of reflexivity that constantly assesses the relationship between 'knowledge' and 'the way of doing knowledge'. For me these ideas connect to having a sceptical approach to established 'truths', to explore more deeply behind people's descriptions and to support the development of the participants' own reflexive process to

explore their own understanding. I have to be aware that I have my own constructions and understandings that influence how I interpret knowledge and take part in knowledge development.

Using a reflexive approach in the sense-making of this thesis creates a space for me to contribute with my ideas and hypotheses without aiming at establishing any "truth" My understanding will always emerge and others' understanding is as true as mine. My thinking about thinking also involves awareness of both my, the participants' and reader's unique constructions and meaning making processes. This perspective also invites me to be careful about not reaching my own conclusions too quickly and lose my curiosity about the participants' understanding. To think about thinking for me also encourages my own reflective process and my thinking about what happens with me during the research, how I become influenced by this journey. These thoughts highlight the importance of being as transparent as possible in my research and to share the choices I make.

The product of my work is language and it is influenced by processes from being involved in interactive communication. Communication and the social construction of this work are inseparable. To think, to write, to interview, to reflect, to theorise, to analyse involves communication in different ways, communication with myself, with the participants and with the text I am creating, not forgetting communication with future readers.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) write that to root one's work in social construction is to plant one's feet squarely in the world of interactive communication. How can I understand this? From my viewpoint this sentence reminds me that when I have put my feet into the social constructionist world, the view and importance of interactions will be all around me. The communicative process of the research could be seen as an on-going process, a process that also will invite people into interactive communication after I have finished this thesis, interactions with future readers.

It is nowadays widely understood that communication is not merely a mode of representing but communication also constitutes reality. Communication creates beliefs and meanings in interactions between people. It could from this view be said that we become together and we make sense through our communication and interactions.

Relation to literature and other sources

My relation to literature and other sources has been complex during the journey of this thesis. In the context of being a systemic practice research I have had the ambition to find my personal relationship to other sources and how they can contribute to my reflexive process in a helpful way. At the same time I also wanted to limit the influences from dominant stories that could colour my personal lenses too much. I wanted to avoid that others' stories would direct my exploration toward the sense-making of other authors instead of the leaders I have interviewed and my own sense-making. I wanted to contribute with new ways of approaching the field. I wanted to catch the themes that arose from the interviews and in my own stories and how they responded to my own developed sense-making and connect this to literature that I found helpful in the moment and in this process. I wanted to be led by what came out from the journey instead of what wise authors within the systemic and social constructionist field might think is relevant. I also wanted to write this thesis like a story without interrupting the storytelling. These aspects moved me away from a traditional literature review.

There are several authors who position themselves or are positioned as appreciative, systemic and social constructionist and who have made an impact on me. I have been and I am very much inspired by for example Peter Lang, Elspeth McAdam, Harlene Andersen, John Shotter, Kenneth and Mary Gergen, Ann Marie Hoskins, David Campbell, Chris Oliver, Gareth Morgan, Barnet Pearce, Vernon Cronen, John Dewey, Gregory Bateson, Umberto Maturana, Ann Cunliffe, Diana Witney, David Cooperrider, Tom Anderson, and Peter Senge just to mention a few. Some of this inspiration will be viewed in this thesis but it is unfortunately not possible to acknowledge all their contribution to my learnings and reflexive process in full. A full acknowledgement would go outside of the defined boundaries of a thesis like this.

On my journey, I also have explored other connections that might not be understood as systemic but they have been very helpful to develop my understanding and practice. From my view it is not possible for me to say who is systemic or not and I also think it could be limiting if we position people as systemic or not. There might be some variables that systemic practitioners would agree on but how we translate these understandings into actions and the sense we make is probably a lot different. Barge (2006) drew our attention

to the managerial field of systemic and social constructionist literature that is still in its infancy. My sense grows when I as a systemic practitioner use myself as a reflective and reflexive partner in relation to the text I read. I look for what responds to me and in what different ways. The reflexive process invites me to reflect on how I can understand what is written and how it can in different ways be connected to my research and professional practice.

From the view above my relationship to literature within this field also has been and is a bit challenging. I love to read and I easily get very inspired by sentences from different authors but I also find that a lot of the literature and theory within the field is written in, for me, a complicated way and with difficult language. With my limited English skills I also take for granted that I miss a lot of the intended meanings and possible applications. The thing I can do as a systemic practitioner is to acknowledge the views I get by being curious about and honouring what different texts can contribute but also to reflect on how I can explore new aspects of my understanding when I reflect on the text from my own unique point of view.

I tried to avoid fixed mind models or theories about leadership to enable my own creativity and sense-making to grow as much as possible. I didn't want to look at the world from any strict mind model that would direct my thinking but I have used some 'models' and theory as metaphors to explore my understanding further. This is as mentioned inspiration from systemic and social constructionist views. Experiences from life are difficult to reference but they have a dominating influence on how I think and act. Sometimes more accessible written text also has given me a possibility to go deep because it has opened up reflections and different meanings, stories I have found have also given me wonderful metaphors to reflect upon.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) expressed an important point. They urged novice grounded theorists to develop fresh theories and thus advocated delaying the literature review to avoid seeing the world through the lens of existing ideas. Their ideas strengthened my idea of how to do it. I don't think it is possible to not look at the data avoiding one's own and others' existing ideas but it is important to acknowledge that I have pre assumptions. With the active choice to wait with some of the literature research I aimed at limit the influence of own and others pre assumptions on the analysis.

Everyone who will read this thesis will probably notice that I have referred a lot to Michael Quinn Patton (2002). In my wish to give sources justice I need to specifically mention him and his book '*Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*'. To read this book has been a wonderful journey and it offered me multiverse descriptions of research philosophy and methods. The book invited me into many interesting views but it also invited different learning styles, it is illustrated with pictures, involves theory and includes inspiring stories, everything interwoven into a whole in a wonderful way. Research became an exciting journey through Patton's inspiring words, pictures and guidance.

Methodology approach

Introduction

Qualitative scholars tell their students: Study the box, observe it, inside and outside, from inside to outside, and outside to inside. Where is it? How did it get there? What's around it? Who says it's a box? What do they mean? Why does it matter? Or does it? What is not 'box'? Ask the box question. Ask others about the box. What's the perspective from inside, from outside? Study diagrams of the box. Find documents related to the box. What has thinking to do with this box anyway? Understand this box. Study another box, and another. Understand box. Understand. Then you can think inside and outside the box. Perhaps for a while until it changes. Until you change, until the outside becomes inside again. Then start over. Study the box. (Quinn Patton, 2002)

In this systemic practice research I study my own box, its inside and outside but I have also studied other boxes and my relation to them. The perspectives of studying the box also highlight that knowledge will grow during the process and it will not be possible to position my learning in separate chapters. Different themes will come up again from the view of different layers but they will be developed through the lenses of new learning. I have tried to challenge my own box and others' views of their boxes. In order not to get lost in the wonder of all possible boxes, their surroundings and their connections, I have been helped by inspiration from methodology and methods I have used. But also methodology is a jungle of possibilities and my main way of relating through the whole research process has been to focus on how this could be a meaningful practice research process.

My method has also been the way I have structured this thesis, a structure that has guided me. To get a first sight of what has influenced my methodology approach it will be important to highlight my philosophical stance and theoretical inspiration.

Theoretical assumptions and philosophical stance

A systemic approach

For me, systemic thinking is a discipline that offers a framework to observe and understand complex, multi-layered processes within an organisation. This would from a leadership view include awareness about how organisations are co-constructed and how we as leaders are involved in constant interactions. Systemic practice offers ideas and methods for how it is possible to develop organisations and leadership based on these assumptions.

The systemic tradition supports the view that our observations of the system affect the system (Boscolo et al., 1987). Chris Oliver writes (2005) that a moral position is implied here of cultivating awareness of the contribution one might be making to the patterns and processes of which one is a part.

At the heart of a systemic orientation to practice is an interest in patterns of connection (Bateson, 1972). Oliver (2005) writes that we look for patterns in how people feel, how they make meaning and how they act, and in the interplay between them. From this view to be reflective would be a natural field for us as systemic practitioners. Oliver writes further that for the social constructionist, like the systemic practitioner, there is a concern and interest in the detail of language, verbal and nonverbal, and in the opportunities and constraints created by communication. The position is taken that our communication makes our social realities; our powers to act, participate, take up positions and make particular contributions. The social constructionist is concerned to employ a reflexive responsibility for the identities, relationships and cultures that we create through the ways we communicate. This requires cultivating consciousness about our behaviour and using that consciousness to develop action that is more sensitive to the needs of the situation.

The use of the word story has a particular place of significance within a systemic orientation (Barge, 2006) and our stories never can articulate the richness of the patterns that we live. This also connects to the idea of a generalised picture that I have been discussing before. How we tell stories and the words we use become from this view very important within systemic practice. In examining and creating stories, a special interest is taken in the

possibilities and constraints embedded in language. The use of a word shapes possibilities for agency and contribution, enabling or disabling meaningful and purposeful participation.

Shotter highlights (1993) that when we examine an individual action and seek explanation for why it has occurred, our resources are limited unless we can explore how that action is embedded in a larger pattern of experiences and stories. We can, from Shotter's view, be helped to make sense of the wider context through an appreciation of the significance of language and how it shapes possibilities.

Campbell *et al*. (1994) say that systemic thinking is a way to make sense of the relatedness of everything around us. It is a way of thinking that gives practitioners the tools to observe the connectedness of people, things, and ideas: everything connected to everything else. The central concern of systems thinking has been identifying the pattern that connects different parts of a larger system. One of the postulates that creates the framework of systemic thinking is: The problem is not a problem itself, but is a part of a larger process involving many 'other' people, other 'behaviours' and other 'meanings'.

Closely connected to a systemic view are social constructionist perspectives. (Barge, 2006; Oliver, 2005; Gergen, 2004) I have found this field particularly interesting to explore philosophical questions of how we humans make sense of the world we experience we live in.

A social constructionist view

Kenneth and Mary Gergen (2004) describe that a social constructionist perspective is based on one major and simple idea, that '*we construct the world we live in*'.

From this view, a social constructionist perspective is interested in: How have people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, truths, explanations, beliefs, and world view? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviours and for those with whom they interact? (Quinn Patton, 2002)

David Campbell (2003) says that '*the central premise of social constructionist thinking is that knowledge is constructed between us.*' This could be understood, for example, as that

in an organisation, individuals have their own world views and when they begin to interact with each other they inevitably constrain or influence others toward some ways of thinking and feeling and away from other ways of thinking and feeling. Campbell describes further that an organisation is something that is being '*constructed continuously on a daily, even momentary basis through individual interactions with others. The organisation never settles into an entity or a thing that can be labelled and described, because it is constantly changing, or reinventing itself, through the interactions going on within it*'. Social constructionists have always asked how people work together to produce realities that we all live by. Social constructionist thinking distinguishes itself from systemic thinking by moving from the question of 'what is happening' to the question of 'how it happens' or from the observation of pattern to the 'explanation of action'.

John Shotter (1997) writes that social constructionism is a growing movement in humanities. He writes that its aim is quite different from just simply proposing yet another new theory within the methodological framework of contemporary academic psychology. Its aim is, as Rorty (1989) puts it, by the introduction of whole new 'vocabularies', whole new ways of talking, 'to change the subject'. Shotter (1997) writes that such changes in such ways of talking can bring to prominence previously unnoticed features of our relations to each other and to our surrounding circumstances and, in this way, lead to the institution of new forms of life, new ways in which people routinely relate themselves to one another and thus treat each other as being.

For the social constructionist, like the systemic practitioner, there is a concern and interest in the detail of language, verbal and non-verbal, and the opportunities and constraints created by communication for the people involved. The position is taken that our communication makes our social realities - our powers to act, participate, take up positions and make particular contributions. Oliver (2005) writes that the social constructionist also is concerned to employ a reflexive responsibility for the identities, relationships and cultures that we create through the ways we communicate. This requires cultivating consciousness to develop action that is more sensitive to the needs of the situations. Michael Quinn Patton (2002) writes that the constructionist researcher would attempt to capture different perspectives through open ended interviews and observations, and then examine the implications of different perceptions (or multiple realities) but would not pronounce which set of perceptions was 'right' or more 'true' or more 'real'. Through these perspectives,

phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalised to another. Data derived from constructivist inquiry represent from Patton's view simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus.

Holstein and Gubrium (2008) write that the practical point of doing constructionist studies has very often been to promote a better way of thinking and, more importantly, living with respect in the worlds we inhabit. They say that the quest to discover universal truth is less useful than research that explores how we have come by, now use, and/or might transcend our current conceptual orientations, but the quest to discover universal truth can also be harmful, because it encourages us to think fatalistically about the status quo and to naturalise aspects of our existence that are not inevitable and ought to be challenged and changed.

I find that the meaning of living with respect in the worlds we inhabit shows the similar aspects as I have mentioned before, to meet others as friendly foreigners and to look with the eyes of wonder. For me the questions above also highlight the act of curiosity and the opportunity for us to explore unknown stories and views. If we are too stuck in our hypotheses we probably will miss a lot of things that we could have asked and explored. We would also miss new learning and sense-making for ourselves and the person who we are invited into a conversation with.

Crotty (1998) makes a useful distinction between constructivism and constructionism, a distinction that illustrates how the process of social construction unfolds among scholars. He points out that constructivism could be described as the unique experience of each one of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other. On the other hand, social constructionism emphasises the hold our cultures have on us; they shape the way in which we see things, even in the way we feel things, and give us a quite definite view of the world.

The thesis evolves from each of these perspectives and could be said to have a social constructivist perspective but it will be described as a systemic constructionist perspective in the text.

Hacking (2000) argues that our first priority in assessing the intellectual value of social constructionist studies should not be to produce a general definition of what exactly the term social constructionism means but to consider the practical point in conducting a social constructionist study. He also highlights that social constructionist research has generally been concerned less with establishing the necessary and sufficient conditions needed to explain empirical events than with raising people's consciousness in a more general sense.

This is also important in the way this research and thesis could be viewed. It will in many ways aim at raising leaders and researcher's consciousness of how we interact and possibilities there are while we interact. The reflexive and reflecting approach hopes to contribute to emergence of sense-making and a curiosity to learn more about ourselves and others.

Barker *et al* (2002) in their turn write that social constructionists see the research setting as a specialised form of social interaction. They argue that researchers are not detached observers, but actively play a part in what they are studying and how they make sense of it. Thus the collection, analysis and interpretation of data involve processes of active construction. A related point is the interdependence of the knower and the known. That is to say, in coming to know a thing, both the state of our knowledge and the thing itself may be changed; what we call facts are a joint construction of the things themselves and our knowing process.

Putting this research within a systemic and social constructionist frame could mean, for example, to see the research setting as a specialised form of social interaction. It is possible to see me as a researcher actively playing a part in what I am trying to study and in how I will make sense of it. This means that this interactive process and how I can work with this in the best and ethical way also will be an important part of the discussion and emergence of knowledge.

Theory as methodology and its consequences on the research and thesis

I would like to see systemic thinking and social constructionist views as intertwined and integrated within me. Based on many years of studies, real life experiences, exciting

conversations with practitioners and authors within the field and experiences from own practice, aspects of these world views have emerged to become a way for me to live and understand the world. But my world view and understanding will always be emerging. These perspectives invite into a never ending emergence of interactions and sense-making.

It is possible to see some patterns in my development in this thesis and it has grown also from using my experiences and passion for systemic practice in the research process. The reflective and reflexive way of living and working is natural to me but it has also been developed during this process. Ethical aspects raised by systemic and social constructionist perspectives will follow the research throughout the whole process. The systemic view in a natural way invites me as an important part of the research, how I influence and become influenced.

Theory within the social constructionist field has deepened my awareness and curiosity, it has challenged taken-for-granted ideas and opened up endless learning. These views have also encouraged and helped me to put words on my way of understanding the world, leadership and research. One important part of this is language, how I use language and what will be created and understood through the language I use. I have become much more aware of the difference in how a person communicates, actions, words used can differ from his or her intention. I have become more aware of the aspects of the function of our communication. In the end the communication act will be experienced in different ways by the beholder. It does not matter if it is spoken words or written language. This becomes an important aspect of management research and it is possible to find many parallels to leadership practice. I have also become much more aware of how pre assumptions live within people as truths. I have become relaxed in that everyone has his or her way of understanding which is their “truths” based on their experiences. Others truths are not truer than mine but it is important for me to acknowledge theirs.

Both perspectives invite a multiverse reality and the view of “no truth”. These perspectives challenge traditional research. The consequences will also be that I in the process will share my own reflections to a high degree. I will also acknowledge the idea of hypothesis, and I have not looked for any truth or made conclusions. To be understood also from a traditional way of doing research, I have packed my summarized sense-making and hypothesis within conceptual ideas.

Systemic practice research

Introduction

Traditionally research into people's everyday practice has either been seen as the application of theory to practice, or as evaluation of their practices in the light of an academic theory (Barge, 2006). A professional doctorate in systemic practice involves reflective intertwining of both research and professional activities.

Pearce and Walters (1996) write that there is an infinitive number of research methods, most of which have not been invented yet. The authors encourage us to think about old methods in new ways. They say that we will learn a language for noticing the features of and describing connections and distinctions among research methods. This language picks out what we as researchers are doing to and with others rather than foregrounds specific aspects of their methods such as for example the use of particular measuring instruments or procedures. One way of looking at systemic practice research is like Pearce and Walter describe it as a cluster of many overlapping but not identical conversations. This could mean that doing research is a process of making sure that all of the necessary conversations occur and balancing their conflicting demands.

The authors say that not all conversations are equally important components and the major difference among research methods, and I would like to add also between researchers, can be understood in which of these conversations we privilege. Researchers may be more or less reflexive, more or less self-aware of different conversations and how they influence the research. There are always infinite possible conversations.

When we analyse a research project the trick will be to make sure that we have identified the most important conversations (Pearce & Walters. 1996). A systemic practice research invites conversations that are helpful for me in my practice but also conversations that I have found stuck out regarding what could be helpful for leaders in the future and systemic leadership practice in general.

The text below was what once attracted me to start the systemic master's programme, a journey which also became a very influential trigger to my research journey.

'*A sea of change is taking place in the world of leadership, organisational studies, community development, management and consultancy. Traditional ways of thinking, problem solving and acting are being supplemented and superseded by creative methods growing out of systemic, social constructionist, pragmatist and appreciative leadership methods. This move into the postmodernist context creates new forms of action and reflection. The new leaders, persons in positions of authority and trust are developing abilities in communication, questioning and reflexivity, managing future visions and action researching to create transformation of environments for fulfilling work*' *(KCC Foundation, 2003).*

The description highlights important themes of this research and also how it is possible to look at systemic practice research. The use of creative, pragmatic and appreciative methods and approaches in the conduct of the research to create new forms of action and reflection; new ways of thinking about and practicing leadership, in this case both for me and future leaders; managing future visions and developing abilities for managing the future; contributing to leadership development, to abilities in communication, questioning and reflexivity; contributing to organisational development and change, with the aim of transforming environments by influence from the leaders.

From the view above, systemic practice research aims to*: create new forms of action and reflection*' (KCC Foundation, 2003; Barge, 2006). This also highlights the perspective that there is no truth which also frames this thesis as a knowledge development of generalised pictures and reflections communicated through what I call stories. Knowledge will also emerge in a never ending process. The generalised pictures and stories emerge from our reflections and from dialogues with other people in which they have shared their generalised pictures/words. However, the aim is to create new actions, to develop practice. If I as a systemic practitioner develop my understanding further, I can take new actions and from these actions I will be able to create new reflections that in their turn will provide new learning.

Pearce and Walters (1996) highlight that we from a systemic perspective could be seen as starting our research with systemic ethical principles which will live through the whole process. A systemic orientation highlights important ethical aspects (Barge, 2006) which are connected to humanity, mind-set, language, action, interaction and co-creation.

A systemic communication perspective as Pearce & Walters (1996) call it, views ethics as constitutive of communication acts, including research. That is ethics are neither “before” nor “after” research but an essential part of research methods at every point of the process. These ideas have had a huge impact on my doing in the way that I have aimed at living my values in all aspects of this process. I have during this exploration and process of emergence also become more true to my values. The process of becoming more true to my values lead me to constantly reflecting on and paying a lot of attention to how my actions, communication and words I use connected to this research and while writing the thesis could influence others. To be true to my values also means to put words on my world view and to anchor my systemic practice in values in a way that will be both transparent and genuine in the way I act as a researcher, in my leadership and as a consultant.

This thesis focuses on my interpersonal working journey and understanding but the research also aims at contributing to others’ interpersonal ways of working.

A systemic approach also incorporates major elements of Schön’s (1987) and Simon’s (2012) idea that research is conducted from within the doing of practice relationships. In the course of conducting the practice and it involves the influencing movement of self and relational reflexivity. As a result, professional activity, learning and research are all enfolded with each other as one in-forms and creates the other in an evolving process.

Cronen (2011) reminds us that Aristotle identified a unique kind of art, praxis, in which the goal of study was not truth (episteme) but practical wisdom (phronesis). There is a sharp difference among researchers about how research should be defined and evaluated. Pearce & Walters (1996) say that the standard definition of theory in science goes something like this: a theory is a set of interrelated propositions, each composed of operationally defined terms, describing falsifiable relationships among variables. In this tradition, the best form of research tests the hypothesised relationships among these variables. But the scholarly community is re thinking its understanding of what counts as a research act, and is giving particular attention to various ways of writing a report of the research.

The authors say that there is not even a consensus on what systemic research might look like. One of the most common definitions is made by Vernon Cronen (1995). He describes it as a practical theory concerned with the way embodied persons in real the world act

together to create patterns of practice that constitute forms of life. A practical theory provides an evolving grammar for conversational practices. The authors say that these practices constitute a family of methods for the study of situated social action where in professionals join with participants. As such the practical theory respects the centrality of the grammatical abilities of the persons in conjoint action.

Practical theories could also be seen as assessed by their consequences. They are developed in order to make human life better. They provide ways of joining in social action so as to promote a socially useful description, explanation, critique and change in situated human life and emergence of new abilities in all parts involved.

A practical theory (Pearce & Walters, 1996) coevolves with both the abilities of its practitioners and the consequences of its use, thus forming a tradition of practice. They also say that researchers must take a particular person position within the conversation comprising their project. The most important differences among research methods from their view stem from the moral orders attached to these person positions.

Although the authors say it might be over-simplified, it may be useful as a first sketch to say that "objective" research methods valorise the third person for the researcher, interpretive research methods valorise the second person plural position for both researcher and those being studied and participation research valorises the first person position for the researcher.

The systemic communication approach to research methods suggests that the "best" research projects involve a moment among person positions for both researchers and those being studied.

In traditional research (Pearce & Walters, 1996) a lot of work is done measuring variables, which are approached as to be real entities that take on different values. In design of research variables are sorted out by ideas about their function. To be accepted in parts of the research community and some conversations with researchers variables must be operationally defined, that is defined in terms of the operations the researcher performs to generate the data (Pearce & Walters, 1996). This view might challenge the acceptance of systemic practice research. But if we take a holistic view of understanding our world,

different views will be important to illustrate the whole and the multiverse we could be said to live in.

An operational definition of a cake could be seen as the recipe. But, today people have become more and more creative with their cooking and we will find myriads of ways of doing chocolate cake which from the beginning just had one recipe. In the emergence of chocolate cakes we also have gained myriads of really tasty cakes. What cakes we desire might differ but many of us have developed our taste and try new cakes which allow us to get new sensations and experiences that we also can share without any idea that there is just one truth of the one and only cake.

My sense of systemic managerial practice research

As mentioned before, Barge (2006) writes that there are only a few readings that specifically address the unique qualities of systemic social constructionist research within a managerial context. This will also open up for me to translate what I consider to be a systemic constructionist research. The way I have translated this and the words I use constitute this thesis and show my unique view of management related systemic social constructionist practice research.

From my view, systemic managerial practice research is just in its birth and to do this research also involves developing ideas about how systemic practice research could be conducted in the future. The sources of knowledge out in our practice that we could learn from are infinite.

Barge (2006) views systemic and constructionist management research as different from other postmodern and critical management approaches. He describes how it integrates systemic thinking and social constructionist theory and creates a unique set of ideas, methods, and techniques that inform managerial practice. We can find similarities within the family therapy field but Barge says that management has a different set of affordances and constraints than family therapy research, which is often related to the similar theoretical background.

Doing systemic management practice research has opened up possibilities without any specific frame to adapt to; it has been wonderful but also confusing. I have been torn between a dream to write this thesis more like a book, sharing stories of sense-making and the wish to structure it methodologically so that it is easy to follow and to be understood in the context of traditional research. I think that I have ended up with something in between.

The methodology in my case in many ways already existed before the research. The way I think about my practice includes theoretical, philosophical and value based views combined with methods and techniques I use in my leadership and consultancy practice that I also wanted to apply when I did the study and my writing. I wanted the whole to live from a systemic appreciative practice approach.

I concluded that whatever choices I have made it is the transparency which is important in order to make it possible to follow my thoughts, my steps, what I have done and the conclusions I have drawn. Some of the choices I have made have had benefits but also excluded other possible interesting ways and learning.

Barge (2006) highlights responsibilities of systemic research and says that the research represents a distinct set of ideas and practices toward developing the capacity of human systems. By articulating the way human systems create and sustain social arrangements such as identity, relationships, and culture through appreciative forms of communication, managers develop their ability to intervene and co-create change.

My systemic leadership practice research involves asking questions, to myself, to others, to literature and to things I experience and find, to reflect on what I experience. To move beyond assumptions and taken for granted knowledge as much as I can, looking at experiences with the eyes of wonder.

With inspiration from a social constructionist view this also means that I have a particular focus on the social construction of knowledge development. This research particularly focuses on the individual's socially constructed reality, what I and the participants experience we know.

Systemic managerial and leadership practice research from my view includes creating and supporting a context that enables people to give their best. It involves how I make sense and can develop my sense-making as a leader and researcher. It also involves how I interact and influence others and how I can develop my communication and questioning skills to increase both my own and others' growth.

The way I am influenced from my practice inevitably influences the way I approach the research context and how I conduct it. As practice research this context allows me to think outside traditional boxes and to conduct it in a creative way that weaves together my own experiences, reflections, learning from conducting the research and from interviews with other leaders, reading and finally my own sense-making of the whole. Since the purpose of this study was to capture the lived experiences, my own and leaders' sense-making, in other words their meaning-making, a qualitative approach became a natural choice.

Smith writes (2003) that we tend to make sense of our social world and express that sense-making to ourselves and others linguistically. Qualitative researchers emphasise the value of analytic strategies that remain as close as possible to the symbolic system in which that sense-making occurs. He describes that qualitative research is generally engaged with exploring, describing and interpreting the personal and social experiences of the participants. An attempt is usually made to understand a small number of participants´ own frames of reference or views of the world rather than trying to test a preconceived hypothesis on a large sample. The primary emphasis lies in how meaning is constructed and shaped discursively.

Quinn Patton (2002) suggests that research should be built on the foundation of a 'paradigm' of choices rather than becoming the handmaiden of any single and inevitably narrow disciplinary or methodological paradigm. But he also warns us to be careful because the exercise of real choice can be elusive.

This is research is based on communication. How I understand and have made sense influences my actions and the way I respond to what I experience. To share my experiences and reflections is one way of communicating how I make sense. The participants in the study have communicated their sense during the interviews, their communication was influenced by the way I communicated, invited into participation but also how I set the

scene, the questions I asked and how I responded. How I finally interpreted learning is shown in the communication act that this thesis could be seen as.

Penham (1994) addresses the participatory aspect of research in the field of communication. She writes that when undertaking research into communication we are also at the same time participating in the very same process we are researching. Penham says that as participating researchers, we need to be oriented toward the momentary order of possibilities. Any act of participation in communication brings about change in understanding; in the act of projecting into the future with our conversations, we are always changing our understandings. So in this view change is inevitable - for both the researcher and the other participants. Communication creates the social world, both for the researcher and the other participants in the process.

The term 'insider research' is often used to describe research projects where the researcher is directly involved or connected to the research setting (Robson, 2002). This is not in my case but the idea also challenges the thought of being an objective outsider where it is possible to study objects external to myself (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). There are several ways to consider aspects of being an inside researcher and one part could be collaborative matters between researcher and participants. I wanted to create a collaborative space and I invited the participants to become active in the analysis by reflecting on their own stories. Another aspect is that I have approached the research field with own experience from working as a manager. This makes me an insider of the phenomenon. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) invite the idea that inside research can help interviews becoming more comfortable, making it possible to talk in a familiar way. This is one way of looking at my own insider aspects in a positive way; my own knowledge from the field hopefully led to me asking questions that the participants felt familiar with and that I did so in a way that showed understanding of their matters and that this influenced the context and supported them in becoming comfortable to tell their stories. Another way to look at the idea of being an inside researcher could be that I also have been exploring my own personal narratives and my own sense-making. All these aspects invite transparency and honesty in the process.

For me systemic leadership practice is not just theory and methods, it is a life philosophy; the view I take on the world. This view also involves how I interact with others and how I can develop constructive ways of interacting and communicating that allow me and others

to feel good about ourselves and to release others' and my own resources and potential. In this case systemic practice research which is also influenced by a social constructionist and appreciative approach also needs to be coherent with the way I live.

My focus on systemic practice research highlights:

- Awareness of and carefulness about the interactions I have and influences I have on others;
- Honouring each individual's social construction;
- Involving how I can develop myself as a researcher and in my profession, understanding myself and others better;
- Inviting into meaningful conversations where constructive and helpful stories can be expressed and told;
- Using appreciative, creative and value based approaches, supporting strengths, life giving forces, and the best of what could be.

A reflexive approach to research

Every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing (Silverman, 2000)

A reflexive approach becomes natural in the systemic practice research field based on the philosophical stance above (Barge, 2006; Oliver, 2005; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Dahlberg et al., 2001).

Quinn Patton (2002) draws our attention to ten top pieces of advice to students considering a qualitative dissertation. One of the top advices he gives is 'prepare to be changed' and he writes that looking deeply at other people's lives will force me to look deeply at myself. Patton argues further that reflexivity is one of the central strategic themes of contemporary postmodern qualitative research.

In the literature there are different uses of the words reflexivity and reflection. Even though the word reflection has followed my whole professional journey it is easy to become confused. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) have made a choice to summarise their generalised picture by naming their view as reflective research. They suggest that reflective research has two basic characteristics; careful interpretation and reflection. They also write that that all references, trivial or non-trivial to empirical data, are the results of interpretations. This view highlights also the idea of knowledge as socially constructed and that we live within multiple truths. The second element they refer to is that reflection turns attention 'inwards', toward the person of the researcher, but also toward the relevant research community, society as a whole, intellectual and cultural traditions, and the central importance as well as problematic nature of language and narrative in the research context. They say that systematic reflection on several different levels can endow the interpretation with quality that makes empirical research of value.

Quinn Patton (2002) has a similar view and writes that as a qualitative researcher it is assumed that I should be reflective about my own voice, perspectives and influences. I need to be aware of my pre-understanding and assumptions and how these influence the research. He writes that reflexivity has entered the qualitative lexicon as a way of emphasising the importance of self-awareness, political, cultural, consciousness and ownership of one's perspectives. Being self-reflexive from his view involves self-questioning and self-understanding. To be reflexive then is to undertake an on-going examination of what I know and how I know it, to have an on-going conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment.

These authors have described similar aspects with different words. I find their thoughts interesting but my personal use of the words are that the word reflection will be a symbol for how I view myself. To, as Patton mentioned, be questioning myself and to be self-aware, to look inwards at my own understanding, sense-making, my feelings, my thoughts, what it is that motivates me, my wishes and also how I experience the world around me but also how I from my understanding, interact with others and my surroundings. In this case how I have reflected on my own understanding has greatly influenced this research. The whole thesis could be seen as a reflective act through which my understanding has grown during the conversations that have been developed, they have evolved and are not possible to separate from what has been and what has become and my understanding is still

emerging. The last chapter will show the main development of my understanding and reflections of these new views. My idea of a reflective approach also highlights that I needed to explore my own sense-making and through reflections I aimed at increasing my understanding and learning. My reflections made me grow as a human being, in the profession as a leader and in my work as a researcher. The learnings from this journey has been endless and includes knowledge of doing research, developing systemic practice research and ethical aspects. The" doing of research" and learning from the research field has enriched my working practice and I have come to see similarities and also developed ideas to apply to leadership, being a consultant and to me as a writer.

Reflections have challenged me to express myself clearer and in a way that could be understood by others. I have become more aware of the complexity in what I would like to communicate, how I express myself as a writer and how it can be experienced. I have reflected a lot on words and how they create different worlds, which words would be the best to use and how could they be interpreted in different ways by others. In the process, I have had extensive time to reflect on ethical aspects and I have during this process as I have mentioned before become much truer to living my values. I believe that I have become more genuine and safe in who I am and want to be. I hope this is visible throughout this thesis. Alveson and Sköldberg (2000) define the research task as a complex interplay between the development of insight, critique and transformation, connecting insights to social action. For me reflexivity gives me an opportunity to invite infinite learning.

I have made a choice to understand reflexivity in relation to this research and in this moment of time like an organised way of viewing the research that included my personal reflections and the actions that grew from these reflections. From my view reflexivity takes into account different aspects, perspectives and different levels but it is also a state of action. With my aim to be reflexive I tried to move from the whole into details, from sentences to looking at grammar, from an insider perspective to looking from the outside. I also had the aim to be reflexive by looking at the content that evolved from different theoretical and practical aspects. I also encouraged the reflexive process by using different learning styles, reflecting on my own understanding and journey, listening to other leaders, reading, having discussions with my supervisor and other people interested in the field, but also through interpreting influences from other media such as poetry, video and music. The

reflexive approach supported me in looking from different views and angles that I could have missed if I just had followed my own passion and understanding.

I perceive a reflexive approach in this research as becoming more aware of how I influence people I meet and things I experience but also the wish to extend the meaning of what I experience to include something I have not noticed before. What new things can I look for and learn about myself, others and life, to be open to new understandings and meanings?

Another important part of the reflexive approach is to reflect on how I and the research context have influenced the participants' responses and meaning-making and how I in my turn respond to their meaning making. This includes careful preparation and well thought through implementation of the interviews, to make well thought through and careful choices of where and how to do it. This also included reflection on ethical aspects.

When I as a researcher shift perspective from inquiring to reflecting a different kind of knowledge develops. My reflexive approach also allows me to take a look at my old experiences of leadership with eyes from today.

Through this reflective and reflexive process I have ended up in the idea of how leaders can be guided by an ethical relational compass which is described in the last chapter. I have also ended up in the view of the importance of a leader's personal development in the co-constructed organisation. How learning will grow if leaders pay attention to what they can learn from interactions and by reflecting on how they influence others and become influenced. To pay attention to living values and learning from interactions within their context and organisation, to look for and explore with help of other members of the organisation what could be helpful and create meaning related to the task.

To inquire in an appreciative way - and Appreciative approach

Appreciative methods and Appreciative Inquiry (Magruder & Mohr, 2001) are often used within systemic leadership and are grounded in social constructionist theory. Appreciative inquiry is mainly mentioned as a collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the 'life giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic, and organisational terms.

Inspired by Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as described by Reed (2007) the focus for this research has been to explore ideas that people have about what is valuable in what they think and do: '*the emphasis is firmly on appreciating the activities and responses from people*'. I have made a choice to say that, I aim at inquiring appreciatively and that I have an appreciative approach. Related to this approach there is a lot of inspiration to gain from the views of Appreciative Inquiry.

A central premise of AI is that the appreciative process of knowing is socially constructed. In other words, knowing takes place through interaction with and within a social system. This is why AI views organisations as centres of human relatedness. Many of the principles in AI flow from the idea that people control their destiny by envisioning what they want and developing actions to move toward the vision (Cooperrider *et al*., 2003). If we see the world as socially constructed through the interactions we have with each other and through communicative processes, an awareness of this opens up the question how we would like to influence others through our interactions and the questions we ask.

A fundamental assumption underlying AI is similar with the social constructionist perspective, namely that the language one uses creates one's reality. This pays attention to the language I use through the interviews and when I write. What realities am I creating and what realities do I want to create?

Cooperrider *et al* (2003) write that deficit based vocabularies are prolific in everyday conversation. Organisations, too, have adopted this mentality and spend considerable resources to train managers to remain vigilant at uncovering problems and identifying issues. As a result, many believe that a manager's job is to solve problems. This mentality from their view constantly seeks to reinforce the idea that only by focusing on the problems can we create a better organisation. The authors highlight that to break through the negative vocabulary framework; AI proposes an affirmative vocabulary of organising for the future. The assumption is that human systems and organisations move in the direction of what they pay attention to. From this view when an appreciative question is asked, it will encourage answers based on strengths and resources, and the answers will obtain and highlight people's best performances and strengths. This principle leads to affirmative managing.

By making a choice to use an appreciative approach and appreciative questions I choose to collaborate in an affirmative way with the participants in the study. But from my view an appreciative approach never will be genuine as long as it is just a choice we adopt or a method; we also need to live it and work on it all the time. For me the appreciative approach has become a more philosophical issue; the view we take on life and the methods and processes that often are described give me helpful metaphors. In the similar way as Lang and McAdam (2012) express it, I am curious about others' ways of being and thinking. This curiosity and wonder from my view invites us to inquire appreciatively and this is something we need to develop as humans. Genuine appreciative curiosity cannot be taught from a book.

Introducing approach to research method

One day in a sudden impulse of generosity a bear decided to enlighten the other animals in the forest about the marvellous properties of honey. The bear assembled all the other animals together for his momentous announcement. 'I have studied the matter at great length, began the bear, and I have decided that honey is the best of all foods. Therefore, I have chosen to like honey. I am going to describe to you the perfect qualities of honey, which due to your past prejudices and lack of experience, you have ignored. Then you will be able to make the same rational decision that I have made. 'Honey come conveniently packed in beautiful shaped prisms of the most delicate texture. It is ready to eat, slides down the throat ever so easily, is a highly nutritious source of energy, digests smoothly, and leaves a lingering taste of sweetness on the palate that provides pleasure for hours. Honey is readily available and requires no special labour to produce since bees do all the work. Its pleasing aroma, light weight, resistance to spoilage and uniformly high quality make it a food beyond compare. It comes ready to consume – no peeling, no killing, no tearing open and there is no waste. What's more, it has so many uses; it can be eaten alone or added to enhance any other food. 'I could go on and on, but suffice it is to say I have studied the situation quite objectively and at great length. A fair and rational analysis leads to only one conclusion. Honey is the supreme food and any reasonable animal will undoubtedly make the same conclusion I have made. I have chosen to like honey' (Quinn Patton, 2002).

The story of the bear is interesting in many ways. The story first of all reminds me that we constantly need to challenge our own assumptions and findings. As a researcher I need to look outside my own understanding. We need to keep our curiosity about others and different views alive even when we get passionate.

The story reminds me of being humble in the way that there are always different views and that my understanding will always be subjective. I will meet other researchers with other views. It is easy to become a bear within my own passion.

A systemic practice research invites subjective matters in a transparent way and supports me to avoid being the bear in the way that I would claim or look for one truth. This view also invites the idea as mentioned earlier by Pearce & Walters (1996) that methods could be interpreted in different ways and that methods are still evolving. A method within a systemic practice research includes no definitive truth. But on the other hand my description of how I have used methods and approaches will show that I have increased my ability to make critical judgements about what has been done when I have been inspired by different methods and approaches (Pearce & Walters, 1996). The story of the bear invites perspectives of how our passion and subjectivity can make us blind and think that our way of thinking and understanding is the only one. These are questions that in their turn invite transparency, reflections and to share hypothesis instead of truth as important contributions into the research field.

The complete analysis isn´t

The moment you cease observing, pack your bags, and leave the field, you will get a remarkably clear insight about that one critical activity you should have observed… but didn't. The moment you turn off the tape recorder, say goodbye, and leave the interview, it will become immediately clear to you what perfect questions you should have asked to tie the whole thing together … but didn't. The moment you begin analysis it will become perfectly clear to you that you are missing the most important pieces of information and that without those pieces of information there is absolutely no hope of making any sense out of what you have. Know then this: The complete analysis isn't.

Analysis finally makes clear what would have been most important to study if only we had known beforehand. Analysis brings moments of terror that nothing sensible will emerge and times of exhilaration from the certainty of having discovered ultimate truth. In between are long periods of hard work, deep thinking, and weight-lifting volumes of material. (From *Halcom's laws of evaluation research*, Quinn Patton, 2002)

Quinn Patton illustrates some of the anxiety there is in doing research and I have constantly during this process found myself wondering how come I didn't ask that question and also found it difficult to leave some of the patterns I have uncovered behind and choose to develop other patterns.

Quinn Patton (2002) writes that qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. He says that no formula exists for that transformation, guidance yes, but no recipe. Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when and if arrived at. He writes further that the inquirer acts as catalyst on raw data, generating and interacting that synthesises new substance born alive from the catalytic conversation. From his view findings emerge like an artistic mural created from collage-like pieces that make sense in new ways when seen and understood as part of a greater whole. My challenge was to make sense of the huge amount of raw material, 40 hours of interviews, and to combine findings with my own experiences and theory inspiration in a natural way. I had to reduce the volume from the interviews a lot and make choices to enable a way to make the material manageable. The reduction and generalised picture that grew became necessary. I have spent many weeks listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts. Even though many of these stories are not told in this thesis they became an important part of this research journey and invited me into many important reflections and learning.

Analysis and method

Introduction

The thesis is built on different blocks and it includes reflections on my own sense-making but also parts of how other leaders and authors have made sense. To analyse the material from the research became an intertwined process of how themes from both my own sense-making and the stories from leaders and authors stood out but also how these stories responded to me and created new and developed reflections in relation to my practice.

The analysis has been influenced by my approach and world view as described above. It has also been done based on a reflexive practice. My analysis method could be seen as based on the different views and steps I have taken based on my understanding of systemic practice research.

I have also used ideas from grounded theory to support the analysis of the interviews and transcripts. But as Charmaz (2006) says, bringing any method into public view inevitably also invites interpretation, re construction and misunderstandings. The analysis process will include how I interpret my personal guidance by grounded theory. The influence of grounded theory will be shown below. In the end the process will show how I have made sense of stories and events the leaders describe but also sense of my own experiences and developed understanding.

To do research for a higher degree aims at showing skills developed, in this case the research and thesis will show pieces of how I have developed my skills within systemic practice research based on a reflexive, appreciative and value based approach. It will also show pieces of skills developed related to my systemic leadership practice which from my view are very close interviewed with my research practice. There is from my view an ocean of connections that could be explored and developed further.

In the act of being a systemic practice research and led by the idea that no objectivity exists, the choice of what was significant became a matter of what responded to me during the process, what stood out from my understanding. This means that there will always be

other possible ideas of relevant connections and essence. This will particularly be important in the case of analysing the interviews. Even though I have had the ambition to do the analysis of the interviews in a structured and "objective as possible" way, the subjective matter will be very much present.

I tried to do the analysis as Charmaz (2006) describes it systematically but yet using guidelines flexibly. It is possible to find many possible constructed ideas, "theories," grounded in the data and this research will only show a part of these possible ideas.

It is also important to involve the whole of this research as "data".

The idea of "conceptualising" that will be developed in the last chapter, values of action, has been influenced by the analysis and could by a grounded theorist friend be described as "theory developed ". This "conceptualising" and result of the analysis based on a systemic practice research also includes my own developed understanding as a researcher and leadership practitioner. The analysis becomes a reflexive process.

The story of the analysis

It is possible to address my research journey and the writing of the thesis with the view of being a story. The analysis is an important part of this story. To look at the analysis with the eyes of being a story revealed the importance of relationships of the world I live in, act out from and it also pays attention to what happened during the journey.

In a similar way as an adventure story could start I started the journey out of my common world, with my feet grounded in what I knew and what was common to me. The research invited me into a call for adventure. I entered parts of the adventure field and moved into the landscape the world of systemic practice research where I have had a possibility to walk around during this process to explore and experience many new things. I explored the landscape and its surroundings, rules, possibilities and limitations.

I had different tasks during the journey. The things I experienced, the learning I got and my reflexive process invited me into a transformation which became my developed understanding. In a traditional story the adventure many times ends when the traveller

returns to the same place where he or she started. I would like to view this returning in another light. With the experiences I have gained it will never be possible for me to return to the same context from which I started because I have become changed.

But I will leave this particularly research journey and research context behind. I will return to my “common surroundings” with a transformed self. This transformation will influence how I will look at and understand the surroundings I used to look at as common.

A first step and the beginning of analysing the interviews

In many ways the actual analysis of the interviews started when I started to think about the research question and my connections to it. My reflections, pre-understanding and assumptions undoubtedly influence. This means that to track analytical insights, reflections that have occurred during the whole process and data collection became an important part of the research.

I constructed the questions which influenced the stories the leaders told me. My sense making became influenced by listening in the actual moment of the interviews and also by listening several times afterwards on the tapes. I had the actual research question in mind while listening.

The flexibility of qualitative research allowed me to follow leads when they occurred. It is natural in systemic practice research to include how I respond to the patterns I find and to reflect on in what ways these patterns attract or communicate with me. This ended up with a lot of notes during the process.

The different steps of the analysis will follow below and you will also be able to find extracts in the appendix.

When it was time to analyse the interviews it was important to follow the purpose of the research and study, to follow the research question. The purpose of this study was to

explore: What stories leaders tell about how they have made sense of leadership and how it is possible for them to influence their organisation to work optimally.

Everything the leaders said was interesting in different ways and could be connected in different ways to the research question. I had two natural ways to start to look at the data; first my own choice depending on the methods I did choose and then also the leaders' own answers to the question of how they had experienced that they have made sense. The first analytic support I had in exploring their stories arose from own reflections and how I have been inspired to reflect on and make sense of leadership. I then analysed the texts with regards to the following perspectives:

- Participants' experiences and observations – what they have seen, heard, noticed
- Participants' expressions of thoughts/reflections connected to observations and experiences
- Participants' expressions of their feelings/sense connected to their experiences and observations
- Participants' expressions of action - learning by doing

These aspects were inspired by ideas from Senge (1994) and his illustrations of ideas based on Ayres. Senge highlights how our earlier understanding will influence how we will pick out information in our observations and draw assumptions from what we experience and see. Our pre understanding will influence the rest of the loop and how our understanding will develop.

Similar views can also be found in the idea of the cognitive triangle as referred to by Fitzgerald (2005). The triangle highlights how our feeling, thinking and doing are interconnected. These aspects above inspired me to get a first go, to start with the analyses and to get a first sense. Gervase Bushe (2001) has also described similar ideas with a metaphor of an experience cube.

Theoretical reflections

Before I move on with how I performed the analysis in more detail I would like to share a couple of theoretical aspects and reflections.

Quinn Patton (2002) writes that there are no formulas for determining significance. No ways exist of perfectly replicating the researcher's analytical thought process. No straight forward test can be applied for reliability and validity. In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this, he says: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study.

Quinn Patton (2002) writes further that applying guidelines requires judgment and creativity. Because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique. Because qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights and capabilities of the inquirer, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the researcher.

I believe that my reflexivity and wish to think outside my own box as well as to think about my own box, has offered me strong guidance. My curiosity to see and experience something new has been important in the analysis, to look at and read the transcripts and to listen to the interviews with eyes of wonder. To have a reflexive approach related to how can this be understood and connected? It has been important to explore with curiosity the generalised pictures the participant words from my view represent.

Even the most rigorous analysis could be said to end up in a generalised picture of the researcher's understanding and no analysis based on a systemic practice will be able to represent truth.

When I read Quinn Patton's quote that there is no complete analysis, in my own translation, no perfect analysis exists, I felt relieved. It is not possible to make this 'perfect' and it is a process that also will grow after I have finished this thesis. But it is as a researcher important to be transparent with what I have done and to show how I have reached the hypothesis I have.

The analysis was guided by my purpose and a structured way of working. To get support with the structure I used ideas from grounded theory to guide me. But this does not mean that the analysis and the research can be looked upon as formed by a rigorous grounded theory approach. One important part of this guidance was to delay the literature research but grounded theory also offered me guiding steps of how to move on with my analysis.

Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) pays attention to the importance of a rigorous process. I believe that the rigour could be looked upon in different ways. The word rigorous itself challenges my systemic view and a reflexive approach would from my view be difficult to define as a rigorous process, but of course it depends on how we understand the word and its meaning. But the view of grounded theory has also emerged a lot the last years (Mills, 2013).

I would prefer to call my analysis as being based on carefulness and diligence. My whole research, the analysis and writing process has been in many ways very carefully conducted, particularly in the way I have constantly reflected on ethical issues and subjective matters about how I might influence the process. These ethical matters also naturally include how to work with the data and to acknowledge the stories of the leaders in a good and ethical way. What could be possible for me to analyse and what needs to speak for itself? How can I show what are my interpretations?

The carefulness has invited the aspect of avoiding assumptions and to instead constantly respond to my own developed personal understanding as a systemic practitioner.

Quinn Patton (2002) writes helpfully that the rigour, duration and procedures of analysis will vary depending on the study's purpose. Likewise the reporting format will vary. Being systemic practice research, with the main inspiration from a social constructionist research field, I am not aiming at any truth. I aim at developing practice and from my view to develop my own and others' sense-making and reflexive approach is an important part of developing practice. This view also aims at inviting the reader into a reflexive and reflecting process.

Charmaz (2006) writes that we with a grounded theory view begin with being open to what is happening in the interview statements so that we might learn of the participant's lives.

Whatever view I have and understanding I need to acknowledge their understanding. But the question is how can I do this?

Acknowledge cannot be the same as knowing. Inspired by grounded theory I started as Charmaz writes with the data I had. This is data that I had constructed by my own learning, from interactions, and material I have gathered. Like most qualitative studies I was allowed to follow up interesting data whatever way they occurred.

Grounded theory has the additional advantage of containing explicit guidelines that showed me how I could proceed. These will follow below.

Inspiration connected to Grounded Theory

Aspects of building a solid ground

'*A journey begins before the travellers depart. So, too, our grounded theory adventure begins as we seek information about what a grounded theory journey entails and what to expect along the way*' (Charmaz, 2010).

I was initially confused in my search for the 'one and only method,' lost in the woods of many theories and methods. I could not find that any one method did fit particularly well but a couple of ideas with grounded theory attracted me.

I had a wish to develop new perspectives and invite new reflections, this could be seen as from a grounded theory view as developing "theory". You could say that "the theory" or "metaphors" that have been developed have been generated from 'observations out in the real world', mine and others. This is also how grounded theory is described by Quinn Patton (2002). He says that the foundational question in grounded theory is; what theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed. Quinn Patton says that we through this theory turn from the fluidity of chaos to the solidity of the ground, specifically, grounded theory.

Systemic and social constructionist views could be looked upon and understood in different ways. Some might in the similar way as me look upon it as the solidity of the ground and others might experience these views as chaotic. A huge change for me during this research process is that I have created a much more solid ground. My hope with this thesis, with its reflections and hypotheses is to invite readers' own reflections. From this view the grounded theory aspects of this research also could be seen as a wish to support development of leaders' own solid ground as well as mine as a researcher and practitioner. During these five years of studies and research I experience that my whole theoretical and philosophical approach also has become more grounded. I also experience that they have also become a naturally connected to the values I would like to live. To show evidence of this kind of personal development and journey is unfortunately not possible but the reflections I share and the thesis will show pieces.

This research should of course also be seen as a way to ground knowledge about leaders' sense-making.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) write that the phrase 'grounded theory' often is used as a general reference to inductive, qualitative analysis, as an identifiable approach to qualitative research but it consists of quite specific methods and systematic procedures. Grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than particular theoretical content.

In my research process the idea of theory could be looked upon in different ways. It could be said that the thesis in its whole will show theory viewed as a story of sense-making which has grown. It will also show how this "theory" has been developed from a systemic, appreciative and reflexive approach.

The process of this research invites the view to look upon theory as not fixed. Instead the theory emerged and will be emerging depending on who will read and how this person including I connect these aspect to one's context. Theory will be understood in the eyes of the beholder.

In the end of the thesis a conceptual idea of the ethical reflexive compass will be shown. This could be seen as developing theory to become a reflexive and practical tool in leadership. This could also be seen as an emergence of my solid ground and how other leaders can build theirs.

The art of doing research

Flick *et al*. (2004) describe grounded theory as art, and so it is a procedure that cannot be learned in the form of prescriptions. They say that grounded theory as artistic and scientific work points out the view of how artists and scientists deal with their material. It is a lovely thing to be able to look upon myself as a researcher as an artist. The question though is how art will be viewed and examined by others. To be able to acknowledge others' art also pays attention to look at it with appreciative curious mind and eyes of wonder, curious about what the artist would like to communicate and value. This highlights the question in what way this art can be helpful and meaningful for me and how I as the viewer can be

helpful to this art so that it becomes interesting. It could naturally be difficult for an artist to describe the whole process of the development of the "product" which will in the end be understood by the subjective mind of the beholder.

One of the strengths that I specifically like with the perspective of grounded theory is the inductive, naturalistic inquiry of approaching in my case the leaders trying to avoid having predetermined hypotheses. As all humans I have had pre understanding but with the appreciative, systemic approach I got support to the genuine curiosity I felt in the interviews and to follow the participants' answers.

These aspects also influenced the structure that I share the participants' views in their own chapter. I made a choice to separate their thoughts and these findings from my world view and philosophical stance, which will be shown in a much higher degree in the first and last chapter. These aspects also influence how come I delayed some of the literature research until after the interviews and when I have seen patterns that stood out and that responded to my systemic practice. Rather my understanding and theory emerged from conversations and interviews connected to my working practice. Reflections, inner dialogues and conversations drove the research process, and my ability to be creative and reflect in a reflexive way revealed the structure of the material.

Emergence of difference in grounded theory

Mills (2013) writes that there is an emergence of difference in grounded theory. Mills describes that the external post positivist grounded theorist would present emergence as a unidirectional relationship between the constituent parts (data) and the emergent property (theory). An external constructionist grounded theorist would focus on mechanistic emergence as present as having a bidirectional relationship between the constituent part (data) and the emergent property (theory).

Finally reflective emergence will be presented as having a bidirectional relationship between the constituent parts (data) and the emergent property (theory) interpreted by an interpretivist grounded theorist. Levers (2013) highlights that there is a shift away from the objective stance of the researcher and recognition of the researcher's role in constructing data and theory.

Mills also says that she finds a lack of critical debate in grounded theory literature regarding the concept of emergence. Duschscher & Morgan (2004) contribute to this discussion with ideas about "forcing fit" rather than allowing fit to emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to a "coding paradigm" and Mills (2013) says that this is more of how to do than "what is" emergence.

Crotty (1988) describes ontology as the study of being and raises questions of the nature of reality and the nature of being a human being in the world. According to Levers (2013) there are two perspectives that represent modern debate of research, if there is a single or multiple realities. Relativist ontology could be described as the belief that reality is a finite subjective experience. Reality is human experience and human experience is reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Mills says that subjectivism is the belief that knowledge always will be filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. This view recognises knowledge as value laden. The goal of subjective research then would be to develop understanding and increase sensitisation to ethical and moral issues and personal emancipation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

To ensure a strong research design researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality (Mills, Bonner & Franscis, 2006).

The positivist paradigm on the other hand is described as conceptualised as having an objectivist epistemology and critical realist ontology (Mills, 2013). In opposition the post positivist paradigm is the interpretivist paradigm which is conceptualised as having relativist ontology with subjectivist epistemology and is aligned with postmodern thought.

Interpretivist research is described by Mills (2013) as guided by the researcher´s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this perspective knowledge is relative to particular circumstances and exists in multiple forms as representations of reality, interpretations of individuals. Interpretivists accept multiple meanings and ways of knowing and acknowledge that "objective reality" never can be captured. I as a researcher will only know it through representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interpretive paradigm focuses primarily on

recognising and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions (Fossey et al, 2002).

The interpretivist way of approaching grounded theory becomes very natural to me. It connects in a smooth way to the beliefs I have expressed and my philosophical stance.

Mills describes the constructionist paradigm as conceptualised as having aspects of both the postpositivist and interpretivist paradigms. Meaning is created through interaction of the interpreter and the interpreted. When we add systemic research practice to this view it might be even more complex with the aim of developing the researcher him or herself in their own practice. Mills says that emergence refers to an entity that is more than the sum of its parts.

The thoughts above invite discussion about the concept of emergence within grounded theory. Mills invites discussions about how emergence could be conceptualised depending on how grounded theory is taken up by the researcher. She says that this will expand on the focusing and fit debate that she experiences exists in the grounded theory literature.

My emerging understanding of a systemic, constructionist approach to grounded theory

Within a systemic view, systems thinking and the philosophy of science (Midgley, 2002; Pearce & Walters, 1996; Barge, 2006) everything in the world could be seen as connected. Therefore, I as a researcher will be an integrated part of the world I observe. In the nature of systemic practice research we rest our beliefs on the similar assumptions and within a social constructionist view. Within the field of systemic practice research I as a systemic practitioner will be invited to research into my own practice (Barge, 2006).

There is also a possibility to connect this research field with a symbolic interactionism perspective of social life including terms like meaning, action and interaction (Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills & Usher, 2013).

Charmaz (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008) writes that grounded theory method has had a long history of engaging both why questions and what and how. She connects this to that a social constructionist approach deals best with what people construct and how this social construction process unfolds. Charmaz refers the term of grounded theory both to the research product and the analytic method of producing it. The grounded theory method begins with inductive strategies for collecting and analysing qualitative data for the purpose of developing middle range theories.

A social constructionist approach to grounded theory allows us from Charmaz's view to address *why* questions while preserving the complexity of social life. Grounded theory will not only be a method for understanding research participants' social constructions but it will also be a method that researchers construct throughout inquiry.

According to Charmaz (2000) her approach to grounded theory recognises mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed. She says that research from a constructionist paradigm acknowledges that truth or meanings come into existence in and out of engagement with realities in our world. There will be a relationship between the data and the emergence through the researcher. The data will influence how the researcher will construct the emergent theory and the emergent theory will influence how the researcher interprets the data. One way of looking at it from Mills view is that the researcher will construct a theory that reduces the complexity found in the data.

Corbin writes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) that she realises that there is no reality out here waiting to be discovered and that reality under no circumstances could be fully understood or re constructed by a researcher.

These aspects will have a huge influence on research. If we cannot discover "reality" and look for truth, what can we look for?

Initial coding is supporting the process of ascribing meaning to data (Chamberlain, et al. 2013). Ascribing meaning from Chamberlain and her colleagues view could not be seen as an isolated act. Through the process of comparing, the researcher interacts with the data, constantly reassessing meaning to what is really going on. This process in a systemic practice research would naturally also include how themes and patterns respond to the

researcher`s own systemic practice and what she or he finds helpful. Interaction with the data will inevitably change meanings and generate new ones (Chamberlain et al., 2013).

Grounded theorists adopt a few strategies to focus their data gathering and analysing, but what they do, how they do it, and why they do it emerge through interacting in the research setting, with their data, colleagues and themselves.

Why, is a word systemic practice from my view would avoid, at least in Swedish contexts. For me the word can be understood as defensive language. It is a word that easily can be used in a negative way, acting towards why you are not doing this and from this view end up in an experience of the questioner being in doubt. From my view, how and how come are words that open up to more curiosity and these are words that I would prefer to use in research. The how come questions opens up a reflecting process and enables the person being asked to explore his or her own sense. The words we use in the interviews will naturally influence our data and the material we have to analyse.

How, when and to what extent grounded theorists invoke social constructionist premises depends for Charmaz (2008) on their epistemological stance and approach to research practice. This makes it particularly interesting from a view of systemic practice research which is still in its birth.

From its beginnings, grounded theory has offered explicit guidelines that promise flexibility and encourage innovation. Charmaz (2006) points out that the value of social constructionism for grounded theory studies has only begun to be mined.

Charmaz (2006) highlights a social constructionist view on grounded theory as an alternative to the objective. The form of constructionism that Charmaz advocates includes:

1. Examining the relativity of the researchers' perspective, positions, practices and research situation

2. The researchers' reflexivity

3. Depictions of social constructions in the studied world

4. Action as a central focus and to see it as arising within socially created situations and social structures

These are all aspects that have been important for me and guided me through the process.

With a 21st century social constructionist grounded theorist approach I should from Charmaz' suggestion rest my method on certain principles:

- Treat the research process itself as a social construction
- Scrutinise my research decisions and directions
- Improvise methodological and analytical strategies throughout the research process
- Collect sufficient data to discern and document how research participants construct their life and worlds

The aspects above have also become a natural part of the research and the analysis process. Grounded theory in combination with a social constructionist approach offered me a method to understand the research participants' social constructions but it was also a method that enabled me to construct 'theory' metaphors during the research process. It became a way for me to be able to address the question of how come, while taking into account the complexity of the leaders' sense-making.

The analysis process

As described earlier, this research includes different parts which also influence the choice of analysis process and how I have been working with the data and its different parts. The way I have approached an analysis process has therefore also been influenced by different aspects such as for example: my theoretical and philosophical approach, use of own experiences and reflective and reflexive processes. I have used a systemic and appreciative approach and ethical aspects have guided me.

In many ways this research could be seen as an analysis, reflection and exploration of my systemic practice doctoral learning journey and how I have developed my systemic practice and understanding during this process but also my skills in conducting systemic practice

research. But the aim has also been to develop systemic practice in general connected to leadership and leadership development. To increase my learning and contribution I also conducted interviews and conducted extensive reading within the field.

The interview data arose from the questions I had asked and was influenced by the appreciative questions and my search for life-giving stories. The research question itself also in a natural way directed the answers and the data I got.

The analysis of the interview data was guided in a structured way and followed particular steps as described below. As I have mentioned in the introduction of the research, a systemic practice research aims at highlighting connections and patterns I have seen and experienced relevant to my practice and systemic practice. This view pays a lot of attention to what I find helpful as a systemic practitioner. To build a solid ground I also used grounded theory analysis ideas to guide and support my analyse process.

Barge (2006) describes different steps that can be helpful when we as systemic practitioners are supported with our analysis by grounded theory; naming, connecting, comparing and storying. These aspects offered me a guiding structure.

Seven-step analysis

1. Mapping under three head themes

The analysis process started by analysing what material I had that could be found connected to the three head themes which arose naturally from my research question:

- Leaders' sense-making
- Views of optimal organisation
- Possibilities to influence

I analysed all interviews and their data with these particular themes in mind and I coloured all text in different colours (representing the three themes) with focus on what I experienced could be connected to the different themes above.

This process ended up in three documents with data from all interviews connected to the three head themes.

2. Coding (first round)

Next step was to do a coding (naming) process connected to these three head themes and I began to separate, sort data through this coding process. Shorter examples of this are described below and longer examples are available in Appendix 2.

Barge (2006) writes that naming involves the coding of the various sections of the text (i.e. words, sentences, paragraphs etc.) and categorising them in some way. This could be seen in my analysis as done in different steps, first naming and coding what stood out and could be relevant to the three main themes.

I marked the codes I found in the margin. See example below and more in Appendix 2.

3. Comparing

Next step was to compare the different codes below each head theme and in the different interviews.

In the comparing step, as described by Barge (2006), I compared the material with the codes to see that these made sense. In my case, such comparison allowed me to elaborate with the codes, exploring different meanings. It enabled me to illuminate the uniqueness of the codes as well as their connection to each other. I also explored and reflected on how they responded to my own practice. I looked for patterns and found similarities.

4. Forming categories

The codes that occurred most frequently became categories.

I looked at the data over and over again now with the categories in mind and marked with coloured pencils once more what I found relevant connected to these categories. I collected the material I found below the categories.

5. Coding (second round)

I used the coding process once more and made codes based on things that I found particularly relevant to the different categories.

6. Generalised working themes with related vignettes

I then developed the categories to generalised working themes. I used generalised headings below which the themes could live. The vignettes I have made a choice to show were sentences I found relevant to themes and its heading.

7. Storying

The final step that Barge describes as storying could be seen as how I developed a coherent narrative about the data for others to read.

With the aim to invite the participants to a collaborative context I also had the second time when we met asked them the question of how they experienced listening to the recording from their first interview but also in general how they have made sense. This process also highlighted the participants' own findings. This data was also included in the analysis process.

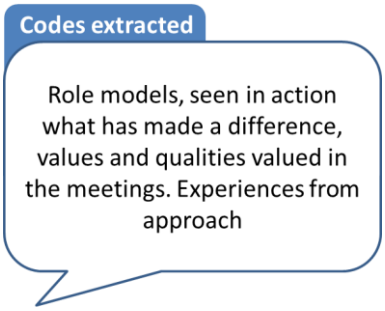
Example of the first coding step

Below is an example of how the codes were explored in the first step. The process and also the analysis process have been described more in detail in Appendix 2.

Data collected under the theme 'Leader's sense-making'

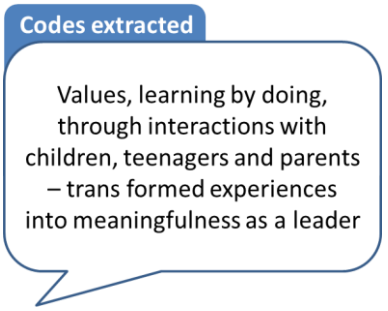
First coding process and extract from the interview with Gustav (fictive name)**:**

If we go a long way back, then it is difficult to know. I have had own experiences of different managers and I have been influenced by different leaders. Unfortunately I have thought that most of them haven't been good but there have been some of them that have had warmth, empathy and being clear about how to run the organisation.

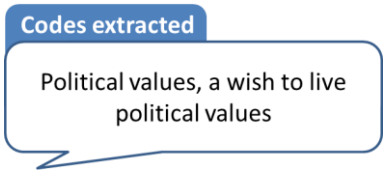


This has been warm, secure and harmonic people. This was people that could be very serious in their work but also have a relaxed way of walk in and out the role as a leader.

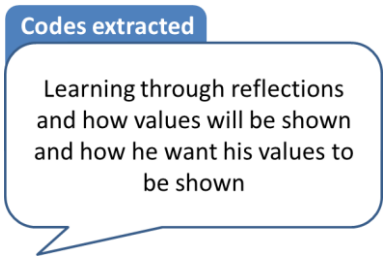
I am sad to say that I don't think that I haven't got my ideas from my parents; I have got my values somewhere else. I think that during my years as a teacher my knowledge and experience has grown slowly. Probably from meetings with different children, teenagers and parents in school, I have met different difficulties and been a part of different meetings and conversations; I have seen and experienced a lot.



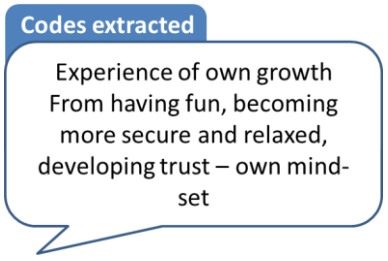
I have left wing sympathies and socialist ground thoughts and values. Words like equal value and solidarity is important for me.



How do you connect solidarity to leadership? It has to be something about that people has the right to be listened at. Even if all of us aren't so talented and we are talented at different things we are a team and we are equal valuable. Everyone can pull their weight to the anthill, everyone contribute with something. What difference does this thinking do? It is very important that nobody will be left outside, behind and that everyone feels that they are involved and are listened at.



I had thoughts that it was a little bit hard to work as a leader. I now think that it is more and more fun. I feel safer, more secure and relaxed; maybe I don't take it as serious as before which influence my approach.



Summary perspectives of the analysis method

From the view of this systemic practice research, the 'How' I did it, what analysis methods I used could be summarised as follows:

- I made a conscious choice to have a particular theoretical view which also influenced the practice – the doing.
- I used myself in the doing as consciously as possible – I explored pre-assumptions, hypotheses and my own understanding to enable an as conscious as possible platform to start from.
- I invited myself to an on-going reflexive approach
- I paid attention to ethical issues as guidance of the doing.
- I have aimed at sharing my own learning and reflections in a transparent way.
- I conducted the interviews guided by ethical aspects and I invited the participants into the development of knowledge by space for reflections and also into reflecting and analysing on their own stories and how they have made sense.
- Guided by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010), I studied my early data and started to separate, sort and synthesise these data. Through a careful comparison, codes and patterns began to take form.
- When I had found codes and transformed them into ´categories/themes I looked at the transcripts again with the eyes of these patterns/themes. I found patterns and stories that strengthened the findings.
- The literature findings became a conscious choice in how themes and my understanding responded to different theoretical aspects. With the aim to also develop systemic leadership practice I used the themes and my own responses as guiding lines of how to connect to literature.

- I have had a reflexive approach in relation to my analysis. This means that I have considered different aspects of how it is possible to understand the themes and patterns I have found.

- I have considered how the findings could be helpful for me in my practice and for others. The reflexive approach has invited on-going reflections from different views and layers such as interpersonal and external views, my views and possible views from other leaders.

- In the process I asked myself the same questions as I asked the participants and used the reflections that arrived to describe my own journey.

Introducing the study

Introduction

A conducted study and interviews has contributed with building blocks to the major body of the findings. The interview project was conducted over a period between June 2009 and December 2009 and included two interviews each with 12 leaders. The main focus for this research was to explore leaders' sense-making, how they had socially constructed their understanding, made sense of leadership. Another aim was to explore the participants' thoughts about how they could influence their organisation to work optimally.

The study consisted of two interviews with each participant. Between the interviews the leaders/participants had the opportunity to listen to their own interview on a CD. The aim for doing this was to invite them to become active in the analysis process of their own stories but also to create space for reflection. They listened and when we met the second time we had a conversation about how they experienced that they had made sense. This created a reflexive process which made them reflect over their own learning process. By reflexive I mean reflections on several levels and the process of knowledge production. In this case it involves how they think about their thinking.

This invitation to reflect from my view enabled the analysis to become a more conjoint action in the way that they became important conversational partners with me in understanding their sense-making. The sum of the whole consists of a story of my sense-making based on patterns that I found stood out from these interviews, inspiration from literature and how these parts related to my own meaning making process.

Identification of participants

I made a choice that I wanted to interview leaders who had worked at least for one year in the role as a manager and with leadership. I wanted to find leaders who had real experience of working with leadership and who could use their experiences to reflect.

My choice was also to find leaders who were in daily interaction with employees in their organisation and I looked for managers who had at least ten employees. The idea behind this was the social constructionist idea that meaning is created together in relations between people and a hypothesis that interaction creates a lot of learning opportunities. My thought was that middle managers are in daily interactions with people in their organisations but they also have to manage their leadership toward their top managers. To be in the 'middle' creates from my view a lot of learning opportunities about leadership. I also included three managers in top positions, managers who expressed strong interest in leadership and who were used to and enjoyed working close to their employees.

I wanted to include leaders from different organisations, to see if I could find patterns that were similar even from different contexts.

The interview schedule can be found in the appendix.

Reflections on samples of participants

I wished to reach out to diverse organisations and to explore if I could find any similarities of how managers make sense even though they belong to different contexts. This is also how come I sent the invitation to participants in different organisations that I thought could represent a wide field. I was heading for generalised pictures of if there could be some essence that was similar even though the participants worked in different kind of organisations?

The different organisations that I ended up with were:

- Social sector
- Health care sector
- Manufacturing
- School – Head teacher
- Treatment centre

- IT consulting
- Consultancy firm
- Pharmacy head quarters
- Service Company
- Wholesale

I also tried to find a balance in the number of women and men but two females fell out of the study when it was shown that they no longer worked as leaders and I ended up with eight men and four women, all of them with at least one year's experience working as a manager and with more than ten employees that they interacted with on daily basis.

As a social constructionist practitioner I believe that the contexts people belong to influence their meaning making processes and also the way they look upon themselves. But it is important to mention that this research did not have the aim to explore how different contexts have influenced the participants or their sense-making. This is a very interesting view but I had to limit the data and focus. This means that I made a choice to not describe each participant in relation to his or her context. If I had gone more into detailed questions and explored their context further and their sense-making in relation to their present context I would probably have had a lot of learning, but this would also have been another focus. I wanted them to lift their own views and to be invited to study the phenomenon of leadership and their sense-making without directing their sense-making in this particular way.

My hope was also to invite their personal leadership and responsibility toward who they would like to become and minimise the risk of getting stuck in things they experienced limited them. This is also why I asked questions related to different time aspects, questions that I hoped would enable them to reflect more in general and from a longer period in their life that started when they were small with influences from childhood until the present but also as an on-going process of future dreams, and what could be, to avoid static ideas.

Conducting interviews

As a systemic and social constructionist researcher I attempted to capture different perspectives through open-ended questions. Then I examined the implications of different perceptions (or multiple realities) but I don't pronounce which set of perceptions are 'right' or more 'true' or more 'real'. 'Data derived from constructivist inquiry represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus' (Quinn Patton, 2002).

With appreciative and opened ended questions I wanted to ensure that if I influenced the future, it should be in a positive way, creating new possibilities for the leaders and how they looked upon leadership, actions and possibilities.

I also used circular questions (Barge, 2006), useful to create awareness of patterns of interaction and communication. Example of a circular question could be when a leader might say I am appreciative; the following circular question could be; how would others notice this? How do you want them to notice this in the future? Circular questions from my view aim at inviting different perspectives and create new awareness and action possibilities. Barge writes that the idea of circular questions is inspired by Bateson (1972) who wrote of micro nystagmus; that the eyes shift back and forth picking up differences in shape, colour, and brightness. Circular questions are based on the notion of circularity and difference.

I had the aim to create a space and to inquire in a way that could follow the participants' answers and I wanted to avoid directing their answers. On the other hand, I also had particular themes I wanted them to explore; these themes also guided the interviews. My follow-up questions aimed at helping the research participants to articulate their meanings.

The aim for the questions was to 'elicit the creative and life-giving events experienced in the workplace' (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). The questions aim to generate specific examples, stories about positive aspects of a manager's life.

Charmaz (2010) draws attention to the proposition that the result from the interview is a construction or re-construction of a reality. She highlights that neutral questions do not

mean neutral interviews. Instead an interview reflects what interviewers and participants bring to the interview, impressions during it, and the relationship constructed through it. Charmaz suggests that researchers from this view should devise a few broad, open-ended questions. By creating open-ended, non-judgemental questions, unanticipated statements and stories will be encouraged to emerge. She highlights that an interview goes beneath the surface of ordinary conversation and examines earlier events, views and feelings afresh.

Another interesting view that Charmaz pays attention to is differences in power and status that may be acted out on and played out in interviews. Powerful people may take charge, turn the interview questions to address topics on their own terms and control the timing. Qualitative interviewing from Charmaz' view provides an open ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight. The interview can elicit views of this person's subjective world.

My experience is that framing questions takes skills and practice. My earlier experience from working as a family therapist and from employing a lot of people in my former organisation has developed my questioning skills a lot. I enjoy asking questions and I am relaxed in interview situations. To interview and explore other people's meanings is one of the things I find most interesting in both my professional and personal life.

I had an interview guide with open-ended questions for the interviews but I nearly didn't use it. The participants' comfort was high priority. I tried to concentrate on the person in front of me and on what the person was saying. I had some headline themes that I followed through all the interviews which were:

Background – Exploration of experiences of leadership, previous organisations, mission etc.

Organisational knowledge – Stories of how optimal organisations could be experienced, the signs of what works well in their own organisation, stories of pride, success factors, how resources and competence are noticed.

Focus on leadership – Stories of how leadership could be understood. Stories of how their own leadership could be noticed.

Learning from childhood – background about leadership, values connected to leadership, inspirational sources

Future – Dreams for the future and steps toward this direction.

Evaluation – Experiences from being a part of the interview and influences from the interview.

Follow-up questions – In the follow-up questions in the second interview the participants were invited to reflect on their previous interview and learning from this with focus on how they experience that they have made sense and possibilities they see.

In the stories I share I have given the participants new names to ensure anonymity.

Ethical considerations

Ethics, too, are nothing but reverence for life. That is what gives me the fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, promoting and enhancing life. Albert Schweitzer 1875-1965.

From a social constructionist perspective I cannot argue for one right way of being ethical or understanding ethics. How each one of us experiences ethics is influenced by the cultures and experiences we have had and have in life and the settings/contexts we belong to. In this way the ethical views that I share in this thesis could be seen as my ethical standpoints and understanding in this context and at this time but I also hope that they are consistent with the values I would like to live in my life.

I do not believe that I can isolate the question of what matters ethically in my research. For me it must be a way of living the research, a research process accompanied by constant reflections about what matters ethically within all aspects of the doing. How I, this research and its narratives influence could be looked upon from many views and levels. I have an ethical responsibility to everyone who has been involved in the thesis and the research and to be careful about how my actions, words and stories might influence them. I also have an ethical responsibility to future readers and how they might be influenced and interpret my words and stories. I also have an ethical responsibility toward the society of researchers to conduct research in an ethical way. Another ethical responsibility is the ethical view on leadership; how I position leadership.

To be guided ethically then highlights the focus on how I might and could influence participants and others and how they experienced themselves in relation to me and this research. Ethical views invited considerations and actions in the process of the planning of the thesis but also during and after.

Being a researcher invites me to constant reflection and awareness of how I influence by the stories I tell. Being a researcher also highlights that different stories could be interpreted in different ways by future readers.

I found that Resnik and Shamo (2003) address similar questions as I do and they write that there are several reasons why it is important to adhere to ethical norms in research. First, **norms promote the aims of research,** such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error. For example, prohibitions against fabricating, falsifying, or misrepresenting research data promote the truth and avoid error.

Second, since research often involves a great deal of cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines and institutions, ethical standards promote the **values that are essential to collaborative work**, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness.

Third, many of the ethical norms help to ensure that researchers can be held **accountable to the public**.

Doing research is inevitably, from my point of view, largely an action of egoism in the way it is led by my own driving forces and interest. It is easy to rationalise and to find satisfying reasons for myself to do certain things. In research this could be for example to find ways to prove my own ideas, assumptions less or more consciously. It could also be a way of justifying my own actions. The ethical view supports me to avoid too much egoism and *to search for the good*. The research aimed at bringing out appreciative stories from the leaders and a wish to add life-giving and inspiring aspects into discussions about leadership and its possibilities.

My research aims at knowledge development and from this perspective an ethical view becomes closely intertwined with how we as researchers look at knowledge and knowledge development.

Gergen and Gergen (2004) write that constructionist ideas challenge traditional assumptions about knowledge and the practice of research. Traditionally the search for knowledge has been associated with the search for truth but the social constructionist view sees knowledge as a product of particular communities, guided by particular assumptions, beliefs and values. They further highlight ethical questions to research by inviting the voices of our subjects and encourage us to '*allow people to speak in their own voices*' and to ask

ourselves the questions: Did our subject authorise us to speak for them? Do we even know if they would agree with our conclusion?

One way of honouring the participants in this research is to address the narrative aspects and sharing their stories. These stories are important to enable us to look from their viewpoint. The knowledge we gain is not just the analysis and findings, it is also the knowledge of their shared stories. Stories that also need to speak for themselves and allow us to respond in each reader's unique way. We need to be aware of multiple truths and that each story will influence the readers in different ways. As a researcher I need to pay attention to how the consequences of our own 'truths' can influence others in ways that are helpful for them.

Research and power

Wenger (1998) writes that theories of meaning attempt to account for the ways people produce meaning of their own. He says that the power that institutions, prescriptions, or individuals have over their practice of community is always mediated by the communities' production of practice. Communities of practice are from Wenger´s view not intrinsically beneficial or harmful.

Aspects of power in the research field can be understood from different views. In the context of research I get a position of power that invites me into careful ethical considerations. As a researcher I am involved in knowledge development. Draper and Dallos (2005) write that power and knowledge could be seen as inextricably intertwined. The authors say that a prime aspect of this is the rise of influence of scientific thoughts. Scientific thoughts often make claims to be objective. I experience that the world of research and expectations from society invite us in different ways to share truths; we look for and are asked for evidence that strengthen our assumptions. We are often in our practice expected to show proof that our conclusions are 'true' and validated. What if we cannot do this? What if it is not possible to be objective and what if it is a huge difference between doing research and to use research findings in the context of leadership?

I think that we as researchers have an ethical responsibility to also express subjectivity aspects related to research and knowledge development. When we state 'truths' we also influence people's future thoughts and actions, we influence how leaders will understand themselves, their organisation and people in their organisations, and we will influence future actions. We might influence people in a way that the uniqueness that belongs to every relationship and context gets lost. If leaders rely on 'truths' they might forget the importance of being themselves and to be curious and to look with eyes of wonder.

How can we as researchers in the field of leadership with our 'knowledge' and reflections inspire leaders to develop themselves in a way that feels comfortable for them and in a way that challenges leaders to move from objectivity and 'truths'? How can we contribute in a way that suits each leader, their unique context and people they interact with? I believe that if we highlight subjective matters, this will also support leaders to become more aware of and acknowledge the subjective world they live in and this will in turn also open up manoeuvring space, the space they always have to think and act in different ways.

Draper and Dallos (2005) also share interesting thoughts about a family system that I find useful related to research relationships and relationships within organisations. The issue of power from their view requires the development of beliefs about responsibilities, decision making, duties, obligations and commitments. The issue of boundaries includes belief of personal space and privacy –the boundaries of the self and shared activity in the 'family'. In order to function we need to establish some ground rules and develop some organisation so that basic physical and material necessaries are met. These aspects remind me that when we do research we also need to establish ground rules of how to do it and we need to consider different relationships. The personal space and integrity is from my view one important ethical aspect in doing interviews and reminder of the power I have when I make interviews and how I use findings.

The ideas also highlight that we orientate and position ourselves within research relationships. 'Rules' and a clear context support us to understand each other better but also what is required. This is similar with leadership. We need to know what is expected from us to be able to give our best.

Draper and Dallos (2005) highlight that constructionist approaches and systemic theory more broadly can give the impression that each member of a relationship has equal power to determine how relationships should be defined and what meanings are given to particular actions. However they say this might not be true. Like the authors' example that children are at the mercy of their parents in forming a view of themselves, I find similar aspects in research and also in the relationship between a leader and the members of the organisation, how people define and understand themselves in relation to researchers, supervisors and leaders. The aspects above also invite the important question that I do not know how much the participants' context influenced and had defined the pictures they had about themselves and the stories they told.

As researchers we have the power to influence how people define themselves through what we pay attention to. Dallos and Draper (2005) write that a more powerful person in a relationship may be better able to impose his or her views, perhaps in subtle ways, through the use of prestige, educational status, greater experiences, and so on. These aspects from a research perspective are very subtle. Another powerful aspect that the authors highlight is the powerful tactic for one person to make reference to what is 'normal and expected'. In organisational and research contexts it could be viewed as what is expected, the best and most appropriate way to act and express and how we in a conscious or less conscious way communicate these ideas.

Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) say that one can position oneself and be positioned through the words we use. I believe that these thoughts have a lot of relevance in the matter of research and power; how we position ourselves with the words we use as researchers positions the participants. I guess that the participants also positioned themselves with the words they used. How we in each interview positioned ourselves and the words I and each participant used enabled different stories to become told. This also highlights that the language we use makes a difference of how we position participants, if they become experts or if they talk to experts.

Foucault (1975) proposed that society contains a repertoire of dominant narratives which shape our thinking and experiences, how we think about ourselves, our inner conversations, and how we interact with each other. Not all stories have equal status. Foucault says that we have a stock of available discourses that are considered appropriate

and relevant to the expression or representation of particular aspects of our lived experience. Dallos and Draper (2005) in their turn say that the idea of dominant stories could be seen as a contrast to constructivist views, that there is a limited array of narratives that has become available to us through our socialisation. I don't find this a contradiction because I believe that the dominant stories we live can shadow other possible stories, stories that could be found if we explore our lived experiences in new ways.

From a social constructionist view we pay attention to the language we use. My communicative actions had a powerful impact on the context I created. Harlene Andersson (Abrahamsson & Berglund, 2000) addresses that language, spoken and unspoken, is the key to our understanding of others and ourselves. In language we create our world, through narratives about ourselves that inform the way that we understand and relate to the events, experiences and people in our lives. Andersson says that in order to become involved and to participate in a client's life I have only one tool: questions. These are questions that come from within the conversation; they are questions to facilitate dialogue and to help me to learn more about what the client is talking about. I would like to add that genuine questions are based on how we look upon our client, the tool we have is our self and our developed relationship to the client. Our tool will also be the responses we get to the questions we ask and also our own responses to these responses.

Andersson says that conversations are never finished. From this view I would like to highlight that the responsibility I have with the questions I ask also moves beyond the actual meeting and toward the consequences of conversations I have invited into.

Stories are authorised through conversations (Freedman & Combs, 1996). The story that is constructed is clearly the person's own, and it is deeply personal. We cannot know where people's stories will go. This calls for curiosity and involvement in each bit of the story as it emerges. Each bit of construction can be responded to with an infinitive number of questions. Freedman and Combs also remind me of the sensitive matter that I through my reflections and hypothesis might create research stories that might not correlate with how the person who told the story thinks or experiences the situation. From my view of a systemic practice research my choice has been to focus on how the stories respond to me in my practice, the participant's interpretations might be different.

Another powerful relation I have had to handle is the relation to other authors and their words. Other authors' ways of expressing themselves made me experience myself and position myself as a researcher in different ways. Who do I become if I challenge 'truths' that other authors have brought to the field? I also have to relate to the power of the systemic practice context I belong to, what would this community and its members think related to what I do and write? This includes people I particularly acknowledge, am impressed by, listen to and trust. They could also be said to have a power over me in the way that I trust them and they affect me emotionally and intellectually.

The participants had a powerful position in the way that they could choose what stories they wanted to share. There could have been other alternative stories. As referenced earlier, Charmaz (2010) addresses a similar question and pays attention to differences in power and status that may be acted out on and played out in interviews. Powerful people may take charge, turn the interview questions to address topics on their own terms and control the timing. I think that it is inevitable that I as a researcher also will respond to different participants' ways of communicating and more or less consciously also adapt to their style.

While doing research there will be different kind of powerful relationships and influence that I have to be aware of and relate to.

Even if power could be seen in the eyes of the beholder there always will be powerful relationships and contexts that naturally should influence me. One example is that I belong to a systemic practice research context and that I am doing a systemic practice doctorate. From my view power related to research in this particular context also could be seen as a "struggle" and sometimes also a tension between different powerful contexts and traditions and how they meet. I believe that there are challenges for us as systemic research practitioners when we meet traditional research contexts. One will be how we will be acknowledged by research colleagues and contexts that could be seen as more powerful, but also how we will acknowledge other traditions and develop new learnings in the meeting between different research traditions, world views and knowledge.

The act of translation

The notion of language is an important part of my whole thesis and the study; the language that is used in the context of this research, the language I explore in texts and the participants' language. Quinn Patton (2002) writes that the real purpose of language from a social constructionist perspective is to communicate the social construction of the dominant members of the group using language and that 'truth' is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality. From this viewpoint, I as a researcher could also be seen as a dominant member of the research context I create in the way I use my language and ask questions.

Morgan (1993) writes that people's views of reality are influenced by conscious and unconscious social constructions associated with language, history, class, cultures and gender experience. He claims that the images and ideas people hold of themselves and their world have a fundamental impact on how their realities unfold. From this view we also could be seen as experiencing our world from the language and words we use. If we look at language and words as generalised pictures, our own understanding then becomes limited depending on how much we have explored the words we use and their meaning to us. The idea of communicating a consensus as Quinn Patton writes about will from my view become an illusion. Our idea of consensus will only work as long as we believe that we mean the same thing and don't explore different meanings. To conduct a thesis in English that has arisen from working with Swedish as first language has also been a challenge in relation to the social construction of meaning. I am translating generalised pictures.

The act of translation could be seen as an act of communication. Communication in its turn could be viewed as a relational act. To view translation as an important ethical part of this research is not just the act of a translation from Swedish to English; it also aims at highlighting the communication acts I have been involved in with the participants and our relational interactions. How I translated the generalised pictures I got. Translation in a wider meaning could be seen as how we translate each other's messages and create meaning from these translations. From my view, we are always translating more or less consciously all things we experience. The success of this translation process will be noticed in if we can understand the other as close as possible to his or her intentions and world view.

Everything we experience involves us in communicative acts and invites our individual translation. Different acts of communication, symbols and attributes people have will also invite communication into personal interpretation. To be a researcher pays attention to being a translator and how I as a researcher interpret the things I experience depends on how I translate. I believe that it is important to constantly develop our awareness of how we translate other people's messages and create our own unique meaning; this makes us more responsible as humans and researchers.

The move toward translating the participants' but also my own words into a new language included many possible interpretations. This act required careful interpretation of the meaning of the sentence the participant shared and how to capture it with the greatest possible fidelity. My limited English made my language in English less colourful than what the participants had expressed in Swedish. I found it difficult to catch the spirit of the participants' words and I sometimes felt that I had difficulty doing justice to their words.

The translation process became important and how I could honour the participants' contribution by translating in a way that exemplifies their thoughts in the best way.

The choice of what words to use became an ethical question, the words I used when I translated the participants' words and words I used in my own descriptions. The meaning I have put into the English words I use could be different from meanings others put into them.

Appreciative translation could be seen as a desire to understand each other and to build bridges between different meanings and understanding in a way that we appreciate and allow individual interpretation to live side by side with our generalised pictures and words.

If we look at communication in a wider aspect we will find various ways of communicating. This thesis focuses on communication with words, spoken, the written but also on our own inner dialogues. During the process of interviewing, other ways of communication with body language and maybe a laugh also strengthened or decreased the meaning of my understanding. Unfortunately I will not be able to reproduce my unique experience of listening in the moment. To see communication as social construction reminds me that I

always add my own interpretations and assumptions, no matter if it is verbal or non-verbal communication, I can make assumptions but I cannot know for sure.

Ethical research guiding points

To be transparent in my quest to be led by ethical considerations, I also thought about ethical codes that could guide me. They can be summarised as:

The appreciative point

I have made a choice to build this thesis on appreciative views and positive cores, to what gives life, and to focus on possibilities and good intentions. From this view I also appreciate different social constructions and that the participants, authors and different actors have different views and understanding that is as true.

The social construction of the material

From a social constructionist view I believe that meanings are created on a momentary basis and in relation between people. This means that the stories and descriptions in this thesis should be seen as stories created in the moment based on my and the participants' understanding in this moment. The stories the participants told have been developed through co-construction, influenced by relationships they have and have had and also from the context they have belonged and belong to in the moment of the interviews. The stories are also influenced by the questions I asked and in what way I asked these questions. My research stories in turn are influenced by interactions with others and inspired by others. The whole thesis could be seen as a social construction that has grown in the soil of the research context but also inspired by different relationships and contexts that I have belonged to and belong to.

My relationship to the idea of being objective

My relationship to the idea of objectivity is shown in the choice of perspectives I have made. A social constructionist perspective points out that people have their own social constructions and that there is not just one simple truth. However, it is always important to

challenge my own assumptions and to be aware that I might think that I am objective. The idea of objectivity invited me to be transparent with my choices.

I tried to avoid bias in the research design, data analysis, data interpretation and other aspects of research where the aim for 'objectivity' could be expected. I also tried to be aware of my own personal interest and passion and in what way it might influence the research and thesis. To highlight the idea of objectivity in this matter for me includes being aware of my interactions and my social constructions of the findings.

Transparency

The aim has been to be transparent with the actions I have taken and to show how my thoughts have developed through the analysis, findings, discussions and hypothetical conclusions. My wish has been to make the thesis easy to understand and follow with a transparency. The transparency aspect also aims at highlighting potential biases and how they might have influenced the research and findings. The transparency hopefully shows my honesty in my communication and openness in sharing data, results, ideas, perspectives, methods, and reflections.

Critical view of my own work

I have tried to be as careful as possible through the whole research process and to examine and criticise my own work in a way that I could keep up to ethical codes and a proper research standard. This perspective also invites the idea of sharing reflections and avoiding conclusions and truths.

Respect of sources of inspiration and knowledge

I have had a wish to honour other authors' work and copyrights. This also invited the idea of the thesis as a collaborative product. All my thoughts are inspired by meeting and interacting with other people and some of the sources are difficult to acknowledge in the way they deserve; people who have guided and inspired me in a way that is not possible to give a proper reference to.

Confidentiality could also be seen as part of this respect. To keep the material from the interviews confidential and to anonymise the material in a way that it is not possible to know who has said what. This also includes protection of documents and personal records in a secure way.

The participants have generously shared their understanding, their descriptions should be looked upon with respect and as the unique descriptions they are.

The reflexive point and development of my own learning

It has been important for me to maintain and improve my own research skills, professionalism and competence through open minded views to look for new perspectives, look for gaps and to increase my own on-going learning and development.

Maturana (2004) writes that, what is said can under no circumstances be separated from the person saying it. There is no possibility of validating one's own assertions with regard to an observer's independent reality, the existence of which is, in addition, considered as evidently given. Nobody can claim to have privileged access to an external reality or truth.

On the other hand Morgan (1993) writes that people in everyday life tend to get trapped by their perspectives and assumptions. As a result we construct, understand and interpret the social world in partial ways, creating interesting sets of insights but obliterating others, as ways of seeing become ways of not seeing.

As a researcher I have had to pay attention to avoid getting trapped in my own assumptions. I have had to be aware of the choices and conclusions I have made and to work with a reflexive mind. By creating some particular account I will deny other meanings and interpretations. Being reflexive entails reflecting on my assumptions and learning and how they will influence me to create particular versions of reality through the research. This is highly an ethical matter.

My own sense-making and pre understanding

My growing sense of leadership

I believe that our life includes many different stories and that we also have our constructions about preferred realities. I have had many life experiences that have influenced the way I make sense of leadership and its possibilities and these stories could also be told in different ways.

I experience that I can learn from the past with eyes from today and I can find several things that protrude. The experiences and thoughts that I have made a choice to present below hopefully will show some of my life learning and I hope that they will contribute to making this research transparent in the way of how I have been influenced through life.

Sense-making from childhood

Unfortunately I only have small pieces of memories from my childhood. Our family moved a lot due to my father's career and I didn't experience that we settled fully as a family in any of the places. I remember a lively family with four kids and with the house often full of friends. I also experienced that my father was rarely at home because he travelled a lot in his work.

The things I remember most from my father during my growing up are connected to the work he did. But I also remember that he loved nature and when he didn't work he went out in the woods looking for blueberries or mushrooms, or with friends to orienteer. When I look back, I experience my father as a very value driven person. He had strong Christian values that also sometimes made me experience him as rather strict. But alongside his Christian values he also lived the values he believed in his work, as a father and in the way he talked about people. It was very important to my father that no one was worth more than anyone else and that we needed to share what nature and life had given us; that we

needed to be humble with what we were given. My father never showed any particular interest in material things. We were fortunate to live in financially good circumstances but we were never allowed to spend money on things that my parents experienced as unnecessary and we left things we didn't use to aid fundraisings. When I look back at my growing up I experience that my father had from the way I look at it one big mission and it was to make the world a better place, to be a father sometimes probably had to come second. This also meant that we as his children should contribute to this in different ways. He made his professional contributions by taking active part in and positioning himself in the field of social work in Sweden and internationally. He was a lawyer and had a bachelor in social science which made a good platform to be able to both discuss social work and to influence the social laws and social security system that were developed in Sweden during the 60-ies and 70-ies. From the positions he had he wrote articles, had conferences and seminars where he could share his standpoints. People listened to him because he became a man who had a lot to share and he also had positions in his professional life that made him an authority.

My father represented Swedish social work internationally for many years and he was also very engaged in developing the Swedish welfare system. From the international journeys he did he brought me dolls with cultural clothes. As a teenager I had ended up with an impressive collection of dolls from different countries. I loved these dolls and the way they were different. The more exotic they were the more I loved them. You could say that I during my childhood had many pieces of the world represented in my room and I developed an international curiosity. I wanted to learn more about others' cultures and understandings.

I remember that my father took me with him to visit refugee camps and orphanages. I think that these experiences and the conversations we had around the dinner table contributed to how I developed a wish to be a part of changing the world. If I look back I also think that I have carried with me a lot of the values my father lived and honoured; social justice, equality and caring about others. The part of not judging in relation to others, not always toward his children though, has for me become something I also honour, even though I also know that this is something I have to work on all the time.

When I grew up my mother worked as a teacher and one of the strongest influences I think that she has had on me was to invite me to the world of books and sharing stories. My mother loved to read and she was also a brilliant storyteller. She took me to the library regularly and I loved to be there, to imagine what could be behind each title and book cover. I read tons of books during my childhood and the world of books has opened up many different worlds for me. My mother's interest invited me into thousands of stories of life, stories of different perspectives that I devoured in my eagerness to read. I am pretty sure that all these stories and different worlds have had an important impact on me and the perspective that we all live in different stories simultaneously. I always dreamt about writing own books and this research has become one way of starting this journey. Recently I also have started to develop my own storytelling skills and this magic and creative way of working has become an important part of my work. Both my parents were interested in political discussions and a lot of discussions took part in our home. The tension of being brought up in conservative surroundings but with socialist views was a challenge that triggered my own political interest and how we view reality.

I have always had a driving force to highlight and explore the other side of the story, the one that is untold. I also experience that I in my professional life have met a lot of dominant stories that have not been constructive. I believe that I have most of my working life tried to find out and explore life giving stories that could contribute in a good way to people's life, give them dignity and hope. I also think that my mother's engagement in questions related to learning and how it is possible to create learning contexts that enable all children to learn and develop their skills has influenced me a lot; she believed in her pupils and their potential. I remember her engagement in finding different creative and joyful ways for children to develop their lust to learn and their collaborative skills.

The interesting thing is that the more space I have had to reflect on my childhood I can notice more and more how my father's and mother's values have been able to be transformed into my life in a way that I feel comfortable with. I can see that I have 'inherited' the wish to change the world to become a better place for everyone and that I am very value driven. I have always had a tendency to argue for what I believe in but during later years I believe I have become more humble and a more active listener.

To be the sister of three brothers probably has influenced me a lot. Their active and many times very brave and competitive adventures made me sometimes feel less brave when I was a child. But on the other hand I now realise that I am brave and I always have been; it was just in relation to my twin and elder brothers that I seemed to be less brave when I was a child. I am happy that life has given me different opportunities to be brave and to challenge myself. Instead of climbing up into high trees or mountains, instead of running fast and competing in triathlon and iron man I have found my own ways that give my life excitement, energy and adventure. Leadership and challenging situations awake the competitive spirit within me and enable me to not give up.

Moving into working life

Co-created identity

During my teenage years I developed an interest in family interactions and this led me to a dream to work in child psychiatry. But before I got the possibility to work in a child psychiatric setting I worked for a while during two summers and weekends in adult psychiatry. This experience was very thoughtful for me and I was horrified about what happened to people in these settings. I experienced that people were treated very badly. I did not think much of how come the people they called by their diagnoses had become this way before they arrived. I became occupied by the thought of how the environment and how people were approached created the way they became and how they felt and reacted.

The experience was overwhelming and it triggered my wish to even more work with children, teenagers and families to avoid that they would end up in this kind of environment. But the most important learning was the experience of how the context and people's interactions influence how people become and sadly enough how they look upon themselves and understand themselves. Even small actions could have a big effect.

So in what ways do I draw connections to the theme of leadership from this story? Leaders possess a great power in the position they have and by how they act. A lot of people are dependent on leaders and not just employees but also clients, customers and everyone who meets the employees in their work, also their families. If organisations and context can

have a strong influence in a negative way, the opposite also could happen. Leaders have the position to live the culture we would like to see in our organisation. As leaders for an organisation we are an important part of influencing how people look upon themselves and their potentials.

When I started to work in child psychiatry I had the similar experience as above. Many teenagers and children changed and became more 'crazy', hurt themselves, got more depressed, more externalising after just one day or two in the ward. If one girl cut herself it was not unusual that other girls followed. In this organisation I experienced my colleagues as very wise and humble but the setting with looked doors, a lot of medicine and the way parents were approached from the understanding of those days' psychoanalytic perspectives influenced from my viewpoint the teenagers to become in a way that we experienced as negative and had to treat. The children and teenagers stayed at the institution without their parents and the psychoanalytic view could have a tendency to position parents with blame. Without parents as the natural authority and the strange and unfamiliar environment I experienced that the children and teenagers often became more 'crazy' and lived up to the expectations from the environment itself.

The most important learning I got from child psychiatry was that when I listened to the parents (because this was also my task) I became aware that they all had done as good as they could from their understanding and circumstances. They had no intention to hurt their children or to make them feel bad. I cannot lie and say that I didn't experience some of the parents as really strange and many of the children/teenagers had a very tough life influenced by their parents' behaviour. But even if many of the children could be seen as 'victims', to approach them as victims was never helpful. This experience was also a very important wake-up moment for me; people do as well as they can from their context and understanding. When I listened to the parents I heard their good intentions and their love, even if their love and actions sometimes came in strange and negative packages.

I could not go on blaming. I realised that blame was not a way forward but neither to feel pity about people.

Living in relations with others

I have been working with people all my life. This means that since I was seventeen I have been working in organisations where daily interactions with other people in the organisations were very important. I have been working in organisations whose mission was to support people in difficult situations, people that didn't feel well or didn't manage their life based on society's requirements. I worked in organisations, hospitals and the social sector, where people were prompted to change or to act differently, organisations where people often were forced to change by using different treatments or medicine that suited other people's ideas about what was the best for them.

From the beginning of my professional journey I became excited about analysing people's life, behaviour and found it very interesting to 'know' and understand more than people did themselves but after a while I felt the heaviness of no hope. I was overwhelmed by all the negative hypotheses we became involved in and how easy it was to think that we as professionals had the truth. When I more actively came to the position that I had the opportunity to listen to people and their own stories, I couldn't avoid hearing people's good intentions and I was touched by the resources I saw despite difficulties. I started to understand that there were so many things I didn't know and that the best resource for getting to know, to explore meaning-making and increase development was the person him or herself. My journey to look for people's resources and coping strategies started.

I started as a nurse and went back to school to study social science. I also studied systemic family therapy a couple of years later and my wish was to find these untold stories of hope and resources that could make a difference. This wish developed to a desire to create contexts that strengthen resources, developed growth and new understandings. I wanted to be a part of encouraging people to take more responsibility for their life, to support people to find new meanings and ways forward that offered new insights and to look upon themselves and others with more humbleness, wider perspectives and hope. I wanted to be a part of giving hope for the future, to become a carrier of hope.

The more I listened to the families and the individuals in the families I became amazed by how different people create their meaning and make sense of their life and relationships. Multiple stories lived side by side. The way parents and their children were experienced

stayed in my own mind and pre-assumptions and the way they became was a lot influenced by our approach. I experienced that it depended on what questions I asked what answers I got. If I asked questions about problems the problems increased. If I asked questions about caring I got more caring parents. If I asked questions about hopes and dreams, I got more hopes and dreams. I experienced that it was much easier for people in conflict to get out of their conflict if they experienced themselves as contributors with good intentions, if they felt resourceful and listened to, if we and I could give them dignity. The years I worked as a family therapist gave my life extremely important experiences but also skills to contribute to have constructive conversations.

The journey to become a leader

My professional journey moved on and I had been working many years with children and teenagers in different ways, with a break to give birth to my two sons and some education when I was asked to work as a manager. I had had leadership positions since I started to work but this was the first time I would have the whole responsibility for economy, quality and the employees.

I was asked if I wanted to become a manager in the unit where I worked and I didn't reflect much about what the management and leadership part would mean when I rather spontaneously said yes. I thought that it would be an adventure and a great experience.

I think that I always have had some competitive instinct, being brought up with my three brothers that competed about nearly everything and always took challenges. I think that it was some of this spirit that made me say yes. When I got this management position the experience of leadership became something that I could not imagine.

The importance of co-creation

When I got the position of being a manager I had a lot of ideas of how we could improve our service. I saw a lot of possibilities. I gathered the employees in different contexts and shared my vision and ideas about what we could do. I was enthusiastic but I got very few positive responses. I tried to go on convincing them of the best way forward but the responses I got were more and more about frustration. I tried to convince them, maybe for

a year, about the benefits for our clients and also what they would get from the ideas I had but the outcome became more and more frustration. The more I talked about possibilities they talked about problems. I started to think that something was wrong with them. How come they didn't see the possibilities there were and how come they didn't care more about the clients we met. I started to think that they had a very limited service focus and with too little focus on the task which also made me frustrated and angry. Many times I had the thought of giving up and I really didn't understand what was wrong with them. Just before I was on my way to totally losing my hope of the organisation I decided that I should have one day when they could speak out. I invited them to share their thoughts of the organisation and their dreams for the future. I decided to not comment anything, just listen. This was not an easy meeting and some of my employees were really strong people with, as I experienced it, also an aggressive approach and tone but I kept to my decision to just listen.

When I listened I tried to make sense behind their words and I came to the conclusion that they probably had not felt that I appreciated the work they were doing when I talked a lot about development and possibilities. I also realised that I had not had the patience to listen to them, what was important to them and their dreams. When I did something magic happened and this enabled a more constructive journey. After I had shown more curiosity and interest they also started to express their dreams. I invited into conversations about shared dreams and the co-creation started. We created dreams and images that nearly everyone could and made a choice to connect to. The ones who didn't want to connect to this dream realised during the process that they had other dreams that might better suit another organisation.

This journey gave me the experience of the importance of starting change with myself. I had to do something different and through my new actions and reflections I learned something new that enabled me to increase my future space of actions. But the experience also made it very obvious that we had created pictures of each other and started to act from these pictures without being curious about each other's understanding. This is not a story about wrong or right and in a situation like this I had as their leader both the position to be able to do something but also the responsibility to do so. It doesn't matter that the pressure and approach I got from people and the groups didn't make it easy for me, as a start I had to change my own actions.

Through this process I also became aware that the values I thought I lived weren't the values they experienced from their point of view. I had not thought about how I could transform the values I wanted to live into leadership and in relation to my employees. The thing that I had in mind was our mission. They 'judged' me from the view they experienced me in my position as a manager and how they understood management. I experienced that my passion for our mission in many ways became irrelevant for them. This experience made me very much aware that I had to develop my sense-making of leadership, explore my values and start to live these values in order to enable the employees to give their best. I also became very much aware that people in organisations communicate from different understandings and contexts and that our different positions and how we understand each other's positions sometimes makes it difficult for us to understand each other. We need to have our different contexts clear and visual to each other so that our conversations become constructive and meaningful.

Another important thing I became aware of was the power of co-creation, the importance to invite and involve employees in the possibilities of the future, to imagine what could be, and that by doing this creating unique engagement and responsibility. This was before I had heard anything about Appreciative Inquiry and it was wonderful to later on also find out that others had put words on similar experiences and developed these ideas. I had a tough start as a leader/manager with many challenging situations but also with great learning, learning I still can draw on when I look back. When I change, others also get the opportunity to change.

When I started to more actively reflect on my interactions with others and how I could interact in a more successful way, I also started to see my own development as a challenge and a privilege to be able to learn more.

During the years I have become more true to myself and my values but in new ways. I have found approaches and actions that correlate with my values and I have found a more relaxed and peaceful way to lead. In this sense I also became much clearer as a leader and found ways to keep the mission and task in front of us all the time. When the employees became more actively engaged in taking responsibility for the future, the organisation grew and developed in a very nice way, the work we did was very much appreciated and successful.

Developing my systemic practice

A few years after I had started to work as a manager I also started to participate in the systemic Master's programme run by the KCC Foundation with Peter Lang and Martin Little. During three years I had the possibility to create space for reflections, new learning, theory and methods that I could apply to my working context. The Master's programme gave me a context where I could challenge my thoughts, actions and to become more aware of consequences of my actions and how I interacted with others. I became encouraged to do new things that enabled me to get new experiences and new understandings as a leader and human being. I developed my wish to learn about myself and others even more. Over the three years when I participated at the programme it contributed a lot to making me more creative and hopeful in how it is possible to work with organisations. The creative contexts that the programme offered and my own self reflexive process created prerequisites for positive changes and hope both in my private and professional life.

Influenced by the context of the master's programme connected to work and life experiences I came to realise that the most important prerequisites for change start in my own mind, and how I make sense. In my profession I need to reach out for and develop my own sense-making in the same way as I need to create prerequisites for others to develop theirs. I have experienced that when I develop my sense-making I also will get more space to manoeuvre and become more creative.

I saw fantastic results in the organisation and I experienced that my approach made a huge difference. I suddenly (even if it didn't go that quickly) became a part of an organisation where people felt important, enjoyed their work, took a lot of responsibility and grew. I am convinced that things I did made a huge difference to how my employees and colleagues experienced themselves and their work. With more awareness of my own actions and how I interacted and influenced I also could take more responsibility for the outcome. My increased curiosity of others' views, new ways of asking questions and skills in how I could invite people into new conversations and task oriented activities made a huge difference. I saw the power of co-creation.

I realised more and more the strengths in working through and together with my employees. Their skilfulness and resources was a treasure chest to scoop from. It was magic

when they also saw themselves in a new light and experienced that they could do things that they had not imagined. People explored, found and developed their resources and while they did this our organisation also grew, became more effective, goal focused and the quality of the things we offered increased.

I learned from trying new ways, from actions but also from reflecting on 'mistakes', using them as learning possibilities. When I saw the difference that these new steps made, I also started to look at myself in new ways and I saw that I had skills that I hadn't experienced before. I became happier at work, had more patience and the positive spirals went on. It might sound easier than it was, it was a hard work and I took well thought through steps. With eyes on the future I also made a choice to remember all the good things that came out of this, a great amount of learning and a fantastic organisation filled with all these fantastic colleagues that did fantastic work. I started to look at my profession with the eyes of wonder.

Stories of 'success'

When I had landed in my leadership role and there was mutual trust between us in the organisation, things started to happen. During my leadership and from collaboration with fantastic colleagues the demand for our services increased which resulted in that we started new units. Just a few years later I had together with colleagues started and managed nine units in different parts of Stockholm and Sweden with more than one hundred employees. I had the lead responsibility for the units, the economy, employees, the content and quality. I know that I would not have been able to do this without all the fantastic people I worked with. Their genuine wish to make a difference to the people they met, with respect to their conditions and potentials, what they could become.

The last year before I left the organisation the group leaders that successfully led the different units became managers with their own full responsibility for their units with me as support and with outermost responsibility for the whole. The unit leaders became a huge support in driving both their own units but also in developing the collaboration between the units to make the best whole of the organisation and the support we offered. We had the fortune to employ a lot of wonderful people during the years. People that in creative, brave and humble ways worked toward a vision of giving the best support and service to

the people we met and our customers. I strongly believe that our strongest success factor was how we all lived our values and our strong belief in human potential. We had many conversations about the values we valued and how we wanted them to be shown in meetings with others. We also had many conversations about dreams for the future and what a good future service could look like. This included how we wanted the people we met to experience our support and service. I think that all these conversations supported us to imagine the outcome and what we had to do to reach the things we valued and wanted to achieve.

I am also very happy for the support I had from my manager and that he believed in me, his trust supported my energy toward the mission. To have colleagues (employees) that shared the vision made it all possible. Our passion, goal focus and values enabled the organisation not just to grow; we also became very successful in our work, very much appreciated and this also led to a very good economy. The success was based on co-creation and collaboration where everyone took a lot of responsibility.

My own experiences from this journey of leadership made me curious to develop even more knowledge about leadership and its possibilities and to learn more from new views. After ten years I decided to leave.

I am extremely happy for the experiences I have had during my years as a leader and also from being a consultant. I have had a unique possibility to develop both personally and professionally. Each meeting and context offers me new reflections and learnings

Pre understanding brought into Systemic Leadership practice and its emergence

The last years when I have been able to combine the research with consultancy work have been very exciting. This has been years when I have had more space to reflect on earlier experiences and new ones and how I would like to develop myself in the future. I have got the reflecting and reflexive space that I did not always experience I had or had while I was working as a manager. In some way I also have come to the conclusion that I was nearly always on my way moving forward along with the huge evolution of the business. I was not present enough to reflect in the way I could have done. This has also lead to a wish to

contribute with context and to support leaders in a way that they can calm down and become the best version of themselves. To be present and able to reflect to find their own wisdom from experiences and interactions they have in their unique context and to enable them to develop their learnings through these experiences.

Supported by this research process I have been able to challenge myself in ways I could not imagine. I am able in my work as a consultant to take a relaxed and well thought through view on leadership and organisational development when I prepare, interact, act, evaluate and reflect.

My pre understanding could in many ways be summarised and described as my huge belief in human growth and capacity, human potential, my own and others. This might be the biggest assumption I brought into this research based on my earlier experiences. I also brought the idea of the importance of values and ethics in the meeting between people in working context and in the research. These aspects invite what we become together which in its turn has influenced the interview process and my writing style. I have also had a wonderful opportunity to explore these matters further in parallel with leaders I have met in my work. Learnings from my work have also become a part that is not possible to separate from this process.

I have found unlimited connections between research, research theory and connection to a systemic approach which could support this perspective to emerge. I have also found aspects of systemic thinking and a social constructionist perspective that the research field could benefit from.

The research has given me a possibility to put words on my thoughts and to reflect in a way that has developed my thoughts and learning further. My relationship to theory and how other authors think has inspired me to think and reflect. I have become more grounded in my own way of living.

I have a strong experience that this research has made me much more solid in my values and philosophical stance. I have also become much calmer in the way I approach, more mindful and present which allows me to listen in new ways.

My pre understanding and its emergence has become a never ending and intertwined process where it is not possible to find a starting point or end. My pre understandings are deeply influenced also by how I have looked at my earlier experiences and made a choice of a reflexive approach and to find meaningful learnings from these experiences.

It will end up very much in how I have come to approach life. During this research process my curiosity and experience of wonder constantly has given me new learnings and I hope it will emerge as long as I live. I have become more grounded in self and theory.

Finally, as a summary comment on the topic of my pre understanding, everything I describe as my personal view in this thesis before presenting the study and before the last chapter can be seen as my pre understanding.

A first conversation about being a leader and leadership

Introduction

Literature research within the field of leadership invites us as researchers to find out what others think, their conclusions and experiences. As a systemic doctoral researcher I aim at developing a creative sensitivity towards the connections between the text I read and my own practice, between inner and outer dialogue to create a reflexive process.

I take the position from a view that acknowledges that we all live within our own social constructions and so do other authors, this is how come even text within the research field in large degree will become a matter of the beholder. It Is not possible to know fully the intention of what is written and this is how come I also need to be humble in the way that when I discuss issues related to others' views this also will be from a view of how I interpret their words and how I understand the meaning of these words.

Below you will find a first step to define being a leader and leadership which will be followed later on with a more deepened description based on a systemic and socialcontructionist view.

Definitions

The definition of the word leader is very simply described in the English Oxford Dictionary as a person who leads or commands a group, organisation or country. Bass (1981) writes that there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.

Hoskins (1988) says that leaders are those who consistently make effective contributions to social order, and who are expected and perceived to do so. She describes leadership as a relational process between leaders and followers.

According to other researchers (for example George *et al*., 2008) in the past 50 years leadership scholars have conducted more than 1000 studies in an attempt to determine the definitive styles, characteristics or personality traits of great leaders and what it is to be a leader. The authors claim that none of these studies has produced a clear profile of the ideal leader or a clear definition of being a leader. They argue that you can learn from others´ experiences but people trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not the replica of someone else. Their findings were that leadership emerged from people's life stories. Consciously and subconsciously, leaders are constantly testing themselves through real world experiences and reframing their life stories to understand who they are at their core (George *et al*., 2008).

Grint (2000) says that there is an overall difficulty to explain leadership and writes that he understands the reason of this in the way that we view being a leader and leadership from a philosophical view that obscures rather than illuminates the phenomenon. In other words he says, the more scientific our methods of analysis become the less likely we are to understand leadership because it is not accessible to scientific approaches. I find Grint's view very interesting and it highlights from my understanding also the importance of that this research did aim at sharing stories about sense-making of leadership told by leaders including my own experiences but no truths.

From Grint's (2000) view most leadership research has tended to be either a review of successful leaders or grounded in survey approaches. Cashman (2008) on the other hand writes that leadership is not simply something we do, it comes from somewhere inside us. Leadership could from Cashman's view be seen as a process, an intimate expression of who we are but it is also relational and our being in action. At its deepest level Cashman says, leadership is authentic self-expression that creates values. Grint (2000) in his turn views leadership as an invention and rooted in and a product of imagination, these aspects of imagination can be viewed backwards and forwards. From how I understand this leadership could be seen as a social construction, like images. The way we imagine this phenomenon, speak about it, words we use and theoretical perspectives will influence how we understand what it is to be a leader and leadership and naturally also how leaders and the members of their organisations perceive leadership.

How we understand what it is to be a leader and look at leadership will also be influenced by how we look at organisations and what we would like to achieve with our organisations. Wheatley (2000) writes about how science tries to find ways to understand living systems. Some organisational theorists and leaders are drawing on insights emerging from ecology, biology and evolutionary theory. Wheatley talks about that we look at nature with hope to find ideas of how to do and to accomplish the skills nature has, as learning, to adapt and change. Our interest becomes influenced by our wish to manage organisations to grow.

One in my view guiding definition is given by Winston and Patterson (2006). They highlight the question if not we as researchers, scholars, consultants, and leaders have caused a problem by examining parts of leadership, but not the whole.

The authors reflect on the story of the blind men describing an elephant and the different accurate descriptions that each blind man gave, yet each was insufficient to understand the whole. But still this story also is based on the individuals' experience.

How would the blind men's descriptions change if the elephant started to walk? The movement of the trunk is different than the movement of the tail which is different than the movement of legs, which is different than the movement of the side of the elephant, which is different than the movement of the ears.

An integrative definition of leadership

Winston and Patterson (2003) offer us an integrative definition of leadership. From their view a leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organisation's mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organisational mission and objectives.

According to the authors the leader achieves this influence by humbly conveying a prophetic vision of the future in clear terms that resonates with the follower(s) beliefs and values in such a way that the follower(s) can understand and interpret the future into present-time action steps. In this process, the leader presents the prophetic vision in

contrast to the present status of the organisation and through the use of critical thinking skills, insight, intuition, and the use of both persuasive rhetoric and interpersonal communication. This would include both active listening and positive discourse. The leader facilitates and draws forth the opinions and beliefs of the followers in a way that the followers move toward clarity of understanding and shared insight. This will in its turn result in influencing the follower(s) to see and accept the future state of the organisation as a desirable condition worth committing personal and corporate resources toward its achievement.

The authors say that the leader achieves this using ethical means and seeks the greater good of the follower(s) in the process of action steps such that the follower(s) is/are better off (including the personal development of the follower as well as emotional and physical healing of the follower) as a result of the interaction with the leader. This would from the authors' view also lead to that a leader can seek personal growth, renewal, regeneration through healthy interactions with his or her followers. The authors' description also highlights the importance of how a leader recognises the diversity of the follower(s) and achieves unity of common values and directions without destroying the uniqueness of the person. The leader accomplishes this through innovative flexible means of education, training, support, and protection that provide each follower with what the follower needs within the reason and scope of the organisation's resources and accommodations relative to the value of accomplishing the organisation's objectives and the growth of the follower.

The leader, in this process of leading, enables the follower(s) to be innovative as well as self-directed within the scope of individual-follower assignments and allows the follower(s) to learn from his/her/their own, as well as others' successes, mistakes, and failures along the process of completing the organisation's objectives. The leader accomplishes this by building credibility and trust with the followers through interaction and feedback to and with the followers that shapes the followers' values, attitudes, and behaviours towards risk, failure, and success.

In doing this, the leader builds the followers' sense of self-worth and self-efficacy such that both the leader and followers are willing and ready to take calculated risks in making decisions to meet the organisation's goals/objectives and through repeated process steps

of risk-taking and decision-making the leader and followers together change the organisation to best accomplish the organisation's objectives.

The leader also recognises the impact and importance of audiences outside of the organisation's system and presents the organisation to outside audiences in such a manner that the audiences have a clear impression of the organisation's purpose and goals and can clearly see the purpose and goals lived out in the life of the leader. In so doing, the leader examines the fit of the organisation relative to the outside environment and shapes both the organisation and the environment to the extent of the leader's capability to ensure the best fit between the organisation and the outside environment.

The leader throughout each leader-follower-audience interaction demonstrates his/her commitment to the values of (a) humility, (b) concern for others, (c) controlled discipline, (d) seeking what is right and good for the organisation, (e) showing mercy in beliefs and actions with all people, (f) focusing on the purpose of the organisation and on the well-being of the followers, and (g) creating and sustaining peace in the organisation–not a lack of conflict but a place where peace grows.

The definition that Winston and Patterson (2003) offer shows many aspects of leadership. I find it interesting and helpful and I particularly like the aspects of being servant to followers and value-based aspects. It will be in helpful and meaningful interactions leaders can support their followers. But the definition also shows the important role leaders have and that it is necessary to pay attention to many important parts in the organisation. It shows the importance of leadership and leader's contribution, its complexity and that this is a never ending process of development. Leadership will become emerging in relationship to relational aspects.

Science and its influence on understanding what it is to be a leader and leadership

Lewis Thomas (2003) says that "*science affects the way we think together*". I find this phrase very interesting and it will from my view give light on ethical aspects. Aspects of how we as researchers describe leadership will inevitably influence how society,

organisational members and leaders will understand leadership and act related to this understanding.

There will always be a responsibility with our words as researchers related to how to put words on and define the phenomenon of being a leader ad leadership. This is also how come I have found it important to listen to leaders' own stories and to avoid any fixed definitions of leadership and being a leader in this research.

I hope to with my research and this thesis invite to a conversations and reflections about leadership and to reflect on possibilities with what leaders with their leadership can contribute with.

But it is still important to be able to locate this research and how I have orientated myself within the huge landscape of views that try to define and describe leadership and what it is to be a leader in different ways.

Systemic practice research aims at creating new forms of action and reflection. As mentioned earlier Barge (2006) addresses that there are only a few readings that specifically address the unique qualities of systemic social constructionist research within a managerial context. This will also open up for us to translate how we as systemic practice researchers understand leadership and being a leader from this view. Most of us who are doing systemic practice research though have our own experience within the field which will inevitably influence our understanding and also how we perceive theory within the field.

The majority of research in systemic constructionist management has focused on how internal and external organisational consultants work with and shape managerial processes. More recently a line of research has emerged that explores how managers use systemic constructionist ideas and practice in their working life (Barge, 2006; Barge & Oliver, 2003; Barge & Little, 2002). My focus will invite the perspective from within a leaders' understanding.

Grint (2000) views leadership as an ensemble of art rather than science. He says further that leadership is concerned with establishing the relationships between four things, the,

who, the what, the how and the why. He says that leadership is closely related to movement – that is getting the body of followers to move in one direction or another. This could from my view be seen as the importance of the direction of the goal and task of the organisation. It could also be understood as the importance of highlighting the leader's role by inviting into conversations that will create meaning for everyone to move toward this direction. This could also highlight leaders' ability to support spaces and context for all employees within different fields to collaborate towards the common goal. Collaborative structures so that all members find meaning and are able to contribute with their particular expertise at the same time as they are able to imagine and contribute to the whole.

From the systemic view the art becomes closely connected to our practice and how our leadership will be shown.

Images of leadership

Grint (2000) says that our assessment of the validity of the account lies not in the world itself but by reference to other worlds. I would like to translate this to not in the word itself but in its relationship to other worlds of words. To define the word leadership and leader from my view becomes like trying to define and explain the words without reference to other worlds of words, it is simply not possible. We could be seen as living in a multiverse world and each person will have their unique understanding of the word related to their world.

Grint says that we have to conclude that there is no objective way which accounts of the world and descriptions are true or closer to the truth because each account has to be adjudged by other accounts.

The role of the leader, from Grint's (2000) view tends to be one where the imagination will be required to act. The imagination then becomes crucial in the construction of what may be viewed as the most important aspect of leadership, the community narrative or myth. This would be a narrative that roots the community in the past, explains its present and conjures up a preferred future. From this view a leader without a persuasive account of the past, present and future is unlikely to remain a leader for long.

Grint views the process of leadership as more important than the level. The imagination of the followers will also be very important because they have to interpret events, gestures, speeches, texts and so on to mean something similar to that which the leader implies. This discussion also highlights that there will never be any guarantee that a follower will interpret a leader's action or words in precisely the same way that the leader intended.

Morgan (2006) writes in his book Images of organisation that traditionally organisations have been viewed from the view of machines and this will influence how we look at employees and the need of leadership. This has also influenced how we talk about leadership and educate leaders. If we imagine that we will get more of what we look for and that the questions we ask direct the answers we get we could say that society and organisations also are responsible for the leaders we have and the leaders we will get. From what I have found, very little in general texts about leadership addresses living values and relational aspects or aspects related to each leader's unique context. Instead it is very easy to find writings about qualities and skills you need to have, about rules, tools and advices how to do, more like recipes. These are all like Grint (2000) mentioned images. These are images perceived by others with from my view maybe also with very little own experience of leadership but they become applied views on leaders and leadership.

As researchers, authors and consultants we have been a part of creating the leaders we have and we are a part of creating the leaders we will get in the future. This is from my view very much based on what we highlight in our writings, words we use, the focus we give but also in the way we design programs for leaders.

Grint (2000) finally defines leadership as an indeterminate skill that masquerades as a determinate skill. He says that leaders tend to operate on a usually false premise - that what they do can determine the future of their organisation. The author says that we know that this is seldom if ever the case. I would like to discuss this statement and I do believe that how we as leaders act will be influential in determining the future of the organisation, this is also how come it is particularly important to discuss and reflect on the consequences of leaders' world view and actions. Leaders have a power in their position which gives them a platform to consider what could be the best for everyone involved, their position also makes it possible for them to act in different ways.

There are from Grint's view so many potentially significant variables in establishing what counts as successful leadership that it is impossible to construct an effective experiment that might generate evidence of the topic. From my view leadership always will be relational and that is also how come it cannot be proven or possible to find evidence of significant variables or if it even should. Each leader would best be developed within his or her unique context within interactions with the rest of the members and related to the goal of the organisation.

Leadership where the heart and head will meet

From a systemic and social constructionist view we will inevitably influence others by the way we interact as leaders. It will be important how we can interact in a helpful and meaningful way and in a way that enables people in the organisation to feel good about themselves and to give their best. Related to this emotions and to lead one's own and others emotions also will become an important part of leadership. In systemic appreciate leadership we want people to feel good about themselves, we focus on life giving stories and what it is that motivates people which also put emotional aspects in front.

Goleman, Boyatzis & Mckee (2004) write that great leaders move us, they ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we according to the authors try to explain what they do so successfully it is easy to start to talk about strategy, visions or powerful ideas. The reality is from the authors' view much more primal. Great leaders work through emotions. Whatever a leader is set to do the success depends on how they will do it.

According to the authors, careful observations of working groups in action revealed several ways the leader plays a vital role in determining the shared emotions. Emotions are by the authors described as highly intense, fleeting and sometimes disruptive to work. Although emotions might seem trivial from a business point of view, they have real consequences for getting the work done. When people feel good, they work at their best. Feeling good lubricates mental efficiency, making people better at understanding information and using decision rules in complex judgements, as well as more flexible in their thinking. Upbeat moods, research verifies, (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011) make people view others or events in

a more positive light that in turns helps people to feel more optimistic about their ability to achieve goals, enhance creativity and decision making skill, it also predisposes people to be more helpful.

From the view of the authors one important aspect for the leader in his or her leadership is to read the emotions of a group in the most accurate way and to avoid creating dissonance. The authors talk about the resonant leader who uses his or her leadership to attune to people's feelings and support them to move into a positive emotional direction. This also includes as a leader to speak authentically from his or her values and resonating with the surrounding emotions.

The root of the word resonance is revealing and the Latin word "*resonare"* means to resound. Resonance, the Oxford English Dictionary states, refers to "the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection, or more specifically, by the synchronous vibration.

The human analogue of synchronous vibration occurs from the view of Goleman, Boyatzis & Mckee when two people are on the same wavelengths emotionally, when they feel in synch. The authors say that leadership that is gifted will be shown in where heart and head will meet, where feeling and thought will meet. All leaders need enough intellect to grasp specifics of the task and challenges at hand. But the authors suggest, the main task of a leader and from this view the role of leadership is to generate excitement, optimism and passion for the job ahead as well as cultivate an atmosphere of cooperation and trust.

The authors put the light on how emotional intelligence will become necessary for the leader to accomplish his or her task and to work successful with his or her leadership. Leadership from the view above will be shown in how I am able to lead, manage my own and also others' emotions.

From the view above I get reflections related to values and how we as humans become emotionally affected by the things we value. To be able to lead others and our own emotions from this view could be seen as being involved in lived values expressed in the organisational context.

A first view of systemic leadership

The research philosophy that has been described earlier will in a natural way also build a ground of how we can understand the phenomenon of being a leader and leadership from a systemic view and inspired by social constructionist perspectives. It is not possible to separate the text written about methodology from how I look at leadership.

Barge (2007) writes that Louis Pondy already 30 years ago challenged leadership theorists and practitioners to move beyond creating typologies of leadership behaviour that identified the surface features of leadership. Pondy (1978) moved us towards the meaning of leadership and the ways leaders use language to creatively make meaning.

A systemic view from Barge's view focuses on developing leaders' abilities to make sense of and articulate the connections among people, language, meaning, action and context. From a systemic view language is viewed as a generative source that can mobilise action and unleash human potential within organisations. Language from this view becomes important in how a leader interacts with their followers and will show how leadership is acted out in the way that language constructs our identities, relationships, organisations and culture.

The systemic approach to leadership puts from my view the light on values and for example as Barge (2007) puts it with an approach that has certain principles underpinning, such as respect and consideration for different points of view. It will be through the process of conversation and listening the business and leadership will be performed. The view Barge describes will also highlight how leaders in their leadership can engage in meaningful conversations, creating leadership and its possibilities through language. Language will be crucial for how a leader in a systemic view will be able to sustain and transform and coordinate their activities with others.

Gregory Bateson (1980) speaks about the "patterns that connect" and he encourages us to move away from teaching facts and instead focus on relationships as the basis of definition. If we should follow Bateson's ideas and try to define what it is to be a leader and leadership the natural way to talk about this would be through relational aspects. But the challenge is that relationships will from a socialconstructionist and systemic view also never be fixed and organisations are like Campbell (2003) describes it, created on momentary basis.

If leadership cannot exist independent from its relationship with members in the organisations, it also will be very difficult to find the one and only definition.

Summary

To define what it is to be a leader and leadership could be seen as philosophical discussion and could include as many views as there are individuals. The words will be understood both by the one in the role of acting out his or her leadership but also by people connected to the system and context in which the leader acts. There could also be a contextual understanding of being a leader in this particular context and directions of how it should be perceived which could in higher or less degree influence how people in this particular organisation perceive the role and phenomenon. When the leader develop his or her leadership and through interactions his or her understanding of leadership hopefully will grow and people who will interact with the leader will develop their ideas about what it is to be a leader and about leadership, its function, role and possibilities.

A summary of a systemic approach on leadership could be seen as infused with a set of value commitments about the importance of communication, connection, uniqueness, emergence and affirmation which will highlight every situation is novel given the unique intersection of people, time, task and place.

Being a leader who embrace a systemic approach are not from Barge's (2007) view a conversational technician, who paint by numbers; this leader could instead be seen as conversational artist who use their colour palette in creative ways according to the unique opportunities and constraints of the situation. I really like this description and it has been helpful to me when I talk with leaders about their palettes and how they would like to use their different possible colours in different contexts. Leaders can be their own leadership artist and create their own personal leadership. The metaphor would be worth exploring further as a metaphor of the art of leadership in the future.

Next will follow the sense of the leaders I have met. After this part I will develop emerging ideas of systemic and social constructionist influences of how we can understand being a leader and leadership related to patterns found in the interviews and my own sense making.

Part two – Learning from conversations with leaders

Introduction

I have my personal experience from life and my profession as a leader. I also have my experience from being a consultant working with leadership questions. This research journey has given me a unique possibility to also learn from other leaders' thoughts and experiences in a way that none of my earlier experiences has given me. To meet other experienced and wise leaders in interviews within a research context has been a huge privilege. These meetings did not just result in material for this thesis; they influenced me in a wider meaning that developed the way I make sense of leadership and its possibilities. I remember these meetings very well, I remember Anna who shared her enthusiasm over her employees, the mission and her inspiring metaphors, Mattias who still young had an impressive wisdom and engagement, I remember Gustav who had his passion in future generations and how his organisation could contribute to this, I also remember Oscar who with his humble way reflected on his own development areas. Eric shared generously stories and influences from his past and so did Antonia. Mary tried to structure her ideas about leadership in a way that could be supportive for her organisation, Sofia showed a strong concern to be loyal to her organisation and Roger shared impressive reflections over life and driving forces. John showed how being brave often will be shown in meetings between people and Bo was brave in the way he was looking for feedback to develop himself. Lucas shared a huge amount of reflections and a passionate interest in what happens when we do things differently. All these twelve leaders shared generously their thoughts and they showed a huge curiosity to explore their own experiences. It was a privilege to meet them and to listen to their experiences, thoughts and stories. With the limited space I have had in this thesis it was not possible to share all the stories I heard, I had to make a choice to collect stories that I found particularly connected to the themes that arose during the analysis process. Some of the participants will not be quoted, and many exciting stories not heard, but this does not mean that these participants' experiences or particular stories were less important or didn't influence me. I hope to come back to these stories in a future book that will allow me to make new choices of what to include.

This is the part of the research journey that will summarise findings from these interviews. It will highlight themes that arose from the analysis. This part will share glimpses of how the leaders' knowledge and reflections inspired me to reflect on certain issues in this thesis.

My way of living mirrors the way I have made sense. I live in my own world of sense-making, but each meeting, experience and reflection invites me into new understandings. How do I as a researcher approach possibilities for new understanding that surrounds me? I will never be able to fully know how come I notice the things I notice and new meanings will be shadowed by my own understanding. But I can look inside myself to become more aware of my own sense-making, I can be curious of what is happening between us and I can look around my own corner to increase my understanding of how others make sense. To meet is to grow and life is a mystery with multiple answers

Structure of the chapter

To give a structure to this chapter that can be easy to follow I decided to divide it into different parts related to the research question:

You will find five parts, they are:

Stories of leadership

This part has the aim to set the scene; it includes a general description of leadership understood from the view of being a manager with theoretical connections.

Sense-making of leadership

The second part will focus on how the leaders actually experience that they have made sense of leadership.

Perception of optimal organisation

The third part consists of images of an optimal organisation.

Stories of possibilities

The fourth part covers how the leaders understand that they can influence their organisations to work optimally.

A systemic and social constructionist view of leadership

This part aims at exploring more explicit a systemic and social constructionist view on being a leader and leadership connected.

The different sections are in turn divided into different headings with the aim to show the main themes that have developed from the analysis and how I have responded in my practice.

The two series of interviews that have been done are used as a resource in each chapter but the chapter on sense-making has its main resource from the second interview series when we had specific focus on this question.

After this entire chapter, there is a chapter named 'Values in action' that summarises my learning. There is no traditional conclusion in this thesis; instead I share hypotheses and questions that aim at leading the discussion further toward new reflections and knowledge development within the field. I also share the "conceptual" idea of an ethical reflexive compass.

Stories of leadership

Understanding leadership

The experiences we all have had about leadership have given us a picture from which we relate to and understand leadership. I experience that there are high expectations on leaders in Sweden and a lot of people discuss and share their 'truths' about leadership. How we experience and understand leadership as leaders is very individual. How people who interact with different leaders perceive leadership is also individual even if they have the same leader. Leadership will be experienced in the eye of the beholder and to understand leadership is a very complex matter.

From my view it is impossible to claim one definition. Many management books and articles define leadership as different qualities and list qualities leaders should have. Consultants are also eager to help to add these qualities to the leadership profession. The definition from my view easily becomes influenced by what is popular or dominating at the moment. As mentioned before, Bruce Winston and Kathleen Patterson (2006) have addressed the problem of varied definitions of leadership. They define leadership as a phenomenon not necessarily combined with a position of being a manager. It highlights the link between a leader and follower(s). It is also clear that to be able to lead you need to have something to lead toward, a mission.

In this thesis the focus has been on being a manager and leadership connected to this position and it is a position that also includes obligations. The link to obligations for the leader is not clear in Winston and Patterson's definition even though they highlight the importance of looking at the whole. From my way of understanding this definition highlights more the leaders as those who 'cause' others to do things. I believe that the definition could have been developed further by taking co-creation and interaction into account. But if we take a deeper look at their description it could involve the relational aspects even if they don't mention this directly. They are talking about influences and from a social constructionist view influences grow from interactions.

The following descriptions from the participants give us some contours of and a glimpse of how it is possible to understand leadership.

Leadership is about co-creation, collaboration and communication, these are the fundamental aspects of leadership. I experience being a manager as a role, a profession and position, and leadership is the role one takes or gets from others (Bo)

It's probably a little bit of a semantic question. To be a manager is a role, a position and leadership is the informal or formal role to get or receive or become dressed by others. A manager is not necessarily a good leader. A leader may not be a good manager; it depends on what you put into it. Leadership is something we do together. (Eric)

To be a manager is more formal, to have budget responsibility, goal oriented, and leadership is about how to manage people. I can often go into a meeting and think, what do I really want out of this meeting? How do I reach this most easily? Is it by going in and screaming and shouting? I am as a person very clear about the goal but the path may not be as clear, I can have a low approach, but I know what I want and usually get what I want. (John)

It is important for me that we drive the business forward and it is I who must ensure that we do it the best way. I don't do this the best way by sitting in my room, I don't work that way. If I have an idea I replant it and involve employees in how we can make this happen the best way. I control but I am extremely aware that when people feel good, you get the best results out of them. (Lucas)

Leadership is to get people to grow. My leadership is about leading a vision but I cannot do this without my team. It is important to get them to grow and believe in this. (Anna)

None of the leaders had a fixed picture and definition but all of them in different ways mentioned that leadership is relational and that it appears best in collaboration. They mentioned the importance of the direction and to lead toward goals but to be able to reach this they are dependent on the 'we', the team and others' growth and how people evolve toward the goals. They highlight that leadership is an interactive process that involves different processes, own development, interactive processes, co-creation, working

processes with the goal in view but also processes that develop members in the organisation to be able to do their best toward the goals of the organisation.

In the leaders' description of how they understood leadership they also started to define the word manager. They described being a manager as a more fixed role and title but they also paid attention to the idea that the position of being a manager gave legitimacy to leadership.

It was also easy to see that many of them associated being a manager with more obligations that in some cases also could be seen as more oppressive.

To be a manager means that I accept certain things. My task is to drive the company forward and to ensure that we do our best. (Lucas)

From this view there wouldn't be any managers if there weren't any tasks or missions to lead. The position of being a manager could be described as a relationship to that something specific needing to be done or safeguarded. Someone is taking responsibility for a certain area.

One way of understanding leadership is also how you manage to perform these obligations and to lead toward the mission, the act of getting people together to accomplish the desired goals. To find ways to use available resources in the best way is an important part of all business and organisational activities.

The participants connected leadership to something that is dependent on others, how people experience you, to have credibility and to earn the leadership.

As a leader you need to be an example of what you say and have credibility. I think it signals confidence in so many more ways than just the spoken word, body language and other signals. If you are not a good model you will lose your leadership. You have to earn their leadership every moment. (Antonia)

Leadership is not something static; you develop as a person and leadership is something that develops in relation to others. Leadership could from this view be seen as a growing

process of self-development. You could say that you are becoming a leader. Like Antonia expresses 'you have to earn leadership in every moment.' These words suggest like Campbell's phrase 'on momentary basis' (Campbell, 2002) that leadership also is constructed on a momentary basis. The role of leadership places high demands on people 'to earn', that people have trust in us. To get trust we need to act in a way that makes people want to follow .These aspects also highlight a reverse power that if you are not accepted, your possibilities to act as leader will be limited. I believe that we sometimes have difficulties to get trust not just because we act in a certain way but because different people find it more or less easy to trust others and particularly leaders depending on their earlier life experiences. Groups could also have earlier experiences, developed patterns and dominant stories that make them less comfortable with and accepting of leadership.

Becoming a leader is something we become together with others in the organisation but it is highly dependent on our own development within these interactions. The act of becoming could then be seen as a never ending story, many times challenging but a story we can influence in many ways.

Making sense of leadership

I think that most what I have learned about leadership has come from my meetings with others, from being a teacher and also from the meeting with my employees. It is based on values I have of human rights. My experiences during the years have made me learn that affinity, fellowship and a clear goal focus is very important. Why are we here, why are we doing the things we do?

I also have learned the importance of participation to be able to take responsibility. And then to find a way to create an atmosphere that is harmonic and permissive. I have learned that it is important that it can be easy to laugh but the context also needs to be able to shift, to do a quick shift from having fun to the sharp real life situation a sharp position. (Gustav)

When I was active in Athletics, we were a small team and we needed to attract more members. I involved people. It could for example look for the strongest guy in school and involve him to become a shot potter. It was fun to get a full team and to manage this I had

to find skilful people that could join. I looked for the talents. I found the fastest and the strongest ones and we won. Suddenly guys that had never been part of any athletic competition were ranked as the second best. When you have run 1500 meters you become so satisfied, you are fully satisfied.

How do you recognise this in leadership?

It is the team building aspects, to build the best team. There will always be challenges and I can feel the excitement like running when I have done something for the first time. The challenges challenge me to give my best. You learn by experience what will work and that it works. (Bo)

According to researchers (for example George *et al*., 2008) in the past 50 years leadership scholars have conducted more than 1000 studies in an attempt to determine the definitive styles, characteristics or personality traits of great leaders. The authors claim that none of these studies has produced a clear profile of the ideal leader. They argue that you can learn from others´ experiences but people trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not the replica of someone else. Their findings were that leadership emerged from people's life stories. Consciously and subconsciously, leaders are constantly testing themselves through real world experiences and reframing their life stories to understand who they are at their core (George *et al*., 2008).

What Gustav and Bo share could be an example of their personal interpretation of leadership and how they have learned from their different life contexts. They give examples of re framing life stories to become meaningful in their view of leadership. I also experience that they have looked for learnings connected to their experiences and they have developed a genuine way of living their beliefs.

Cashman (2008) writes that leadership is not simply something we do. It comes from somewhere inside us. Leadership is a process, an intimate expression of who we are. It is our being in action. At its deepest level, leadership is authentic self-expression that creates values.

Cashman's words highlight for me at least four important aspects of how we can make sense of leadership.

The view that leadership comes from somewhere inside us pays attention to who we are and our identity. It is not just what we do; we cannot distinguish between ourselves and our actions. Leadership begins and ends with ourselves as the main tool.

Leadership as a process pays from my view attention to that we always are under development and that nothing stands still. Our development could be seen like a process, something that has grown from within and from experiences we have had in life. We have added new experiences and come to look at new ones in new light; our learning develops through meaning making processes. These processes also highlight the aspect of co-creation, how we become leaders in relation to others.

Cashman also highlights leadership as an expression of who we are. The way I would like to understand this is that we could be seen as living our beliefs and values in the meeting with others. I would like to add the view of who we are from the understanding we have from this particular place, in this context and at this particular time. If leadership is to be seen as a process there will be no static current. I have and all of us have different sides of our personality, different skills and development areas that will be more or less dominating in different contexts and in the meeting with different people. From this view leadership cannot in full be an expression of who we are but maybe it shows a piece of who we become in this particular situation.

Our being in action connects to the text above but also highlights the relative aspect that we become in our actions and within interactions with others. Cashman's last sentence that leadership could be seen as an authentic self-expression that creates values has for me a double meaning. To be authentic in self-expression we need to know our beliefs and values and to be able to transform them into actions. If we are authentic we will live our values but as Cashman highlights we will also create values from the way we act.

One of my experiences from dialogues with many leaders but also from the interviews has made it obvious to me that many leaders in their professional settings to a large extent are not used to talk about leadership and the meaning we put into leadership.

When I at the end of the interviewing process evaluated the experience of being interviewed, each one of them in different ways expressed that it had been a positive experience and also appreciation of being able to talk about leadership.

I think that it is really exciting to sit like this. It becomes a possibility for me to reflect. At the moment it is a little bit dizzy in my head but I am sure that it will create a lot of thoughts and reflections for me. (Mary)

Wonderful, you are incredible in giving attention, good at listening. It is so good to talk. I do not put words on it otherwise. I think about it but still do not sit with someone at the clinic and talk about this. I think it is incredible to do so, to listen to the tapes. I think it was wonderful. It feels like you understand. You catch up and are incredibly observant. (Antonia)

It has been funny, it has required of me to reflect and think, it feels good for me. It's also fun to talk about a topic which I think is important. I think that it is often neglected. That people do not allow themselves to take the opportunities to talk that are available. It can affect their environment. (Lucas)

I feel strengthened; I don't usually get time to talk about leadership. We have time with our management team but then we mostly talk about the production. (Bo)

To talk about leadership could be seen as very important but how and in what context will probably influence how comfortable leaders will be to share their thoughts and challenge themselves.

To start conversations about leadership highlights how we understand the word itself. I experience that the word leader has different meanings to different people, also dependent on if they are leaders or not. In the study I experienced that the leaders had similar understanding of the word leadership and as rather comfortable in the way they used the word leader. This is interesting and could be understood from the view that all of them seemed to have a passionate interest in the field. They also had made a choice to participate in a study based on the words I used in the invitation. The invitation might have attracted people to become comfortable with similar ways of expressing themselves.

The choice to be a manager

One requirement for leadership is personal vision and the ability to visualise your goal. What is it that you would like to contribute with? The choice to want to become a leader is actualised in the start of our leadership journey and how we imagine what we would like to contribute with, but I also believe that this choice will follow us during our whole profession. Most of the leaders expressed the idea of a choice but Antonia was the one who paid the subject most attention:

It is important to consider why you want to be a manager. As a manager, it is important to know what it is you want to make an impact on. For my part, it has always been important for me to know what kind of assignments I have and what issues I should drive. If I do not know what questions to drive, then how can my employees know? (Antonia)

The choice to have a position and the choice to lead could be seen as different things. You can choose to become a manager and hold a certain position without giving it a thought about how you would like to lead or if you really want to lead. For many people the fact that you possess a certain position probably could be the most driving force, to be able to influence and all the exciting things this position contributes to.

One thing that I have found interesting is the difference of making a choice to be a manager and to become a leader. This also includes the choice to be a manager in this particular setting, in this organisation and in relation to this particular mission and its tasks. But it also includes a choice to lead these particular persons through interactions and in collaboration toward the mission. What difference does it make in the process of becoming a leader and to have the position of being a manager if this is a choice you actively have made or not?

I have to know what I want as a manager. What I've been thinking about is that you not only have to want to be a manager, it is also important to think about what you want with this mission. What do I want to do that made me want this mission? I think people sometimes are looking for jobs without really knowing what they want to do. (Antonia)

Antonia encourages us to think about the results we would like to achieve with our actions and this view could include both results related to the task but also to the mission to lead

others in a successful way that enables them to reach required goals. These thoughts put the act of choosing to be or become a leader in focus and what I want to contribute with. This includes having a vision of what I would like to contribute to and how this will be noticed. I think that the choice we make or not make will influence the way we as leaders look upon our manoeuvring space. The mission could be seen as limited but if we have made a choice to lead and are passionate about the mission, we also probably are more motivated to find ways to execute the mission in a good way. I believe that when we make this choice, it also becomes easier to find our unique passion and driving forces. I believe that it is much easier to be creative when it is related to something we desire or wish. I also believe that if we have made a choice that we want lead, this choice will be noticed by the rest of the organisation through our engagement and it will contribute to that employees will experience their context and their task as important.

The leaders came from very different organisations and settings, but all of them expressed what I experienced as a passion in relation to their task in different ways. I experienced that a couple of them had a passion to lead and others might have fallen in love with a specific field and that's why they also wanted to lead within this field.

I need to be driven by passion and things I believe in. I believe that my energy has a rub off effect on others. For me there are no problems, there are situations we need to solve. I have a vision that we should become the new institution that weaves together pharmacy with everything that surrounds it. (Anna)

I believe that the choices we make are based on different driving forces and our driving forces can also change during our leadership. Our driving forces could also be more or less conscious and represent more or less individual needs but also dreams of what we would like to achieve with this position. The choice we make when we become leaders invites us to consider what it is that drives us and what we would like to be driven by in the future.

The main focus for the participants' passion might have been different but most of them expressed that their passion was oriented toward enabling others to give their best in the organisation.

L*eadership is like the passionate feeling of having a child. As a leader in this organisation my focus has been from day one to look at what worked well and how we can collaborate towards the goals. I am there to support them to be able to give their best. Being able to manage the things we have decided to do gives the whole organisation a lot of energy, a hell of a lot of energy. (Bo)*

I believe that to be passionate about the specific subject can create a lot of energy toward achieving goals and to be a part of making a difference. On the other hand it may also be a hindrance if there are circumstances that you experience influence your own passion in a negative way. The passion might also mislead us if we want too much and forget that the organisation depends on co-creation. We all have different passions and different aspects of leadership and its mission will attract us. One question related to our choice is how we can find a good balance to be emotionally and personally engaged in relation to the cause and keep the focus on that this is a profession.

I wish to be proud of what I am doing. (Bo)

To be a leader is from my view a role that is not possible to separate from being ourselves. This includes our personal development which will have a close connection to how we handle the role we have. How we live our leadership will make a huge difference: Are we genuine and solid in our values and humanity? Are values and driving forces connected? Will our wish to give our best stress us in a negative way or gives us energy and joy. I think that when we become aware of our driving forces, passion but also prerequisites for our work, it also will be much easier to choose more consciously how we would like our profession to influence us in different ways. How can we allow ourselves to become involved and engaged in a way that suits each one of us and that gives us good energy and contribute to satisfaction in life? To have passion for the mission and the cause does not need to be in opposition to a passion to lead and to create context for the members of the organisation to use their resources in the best way.

If we look at leadership from the metaphor of playing the trumpet, you need to blow hard enough to make a sound but not too hard and not without nuances in order to make it enjoyable. Furthermore, if you look at an organisation from the metaphor of an orchestra, as the conductor you also need to be passionate about the aim and the piece of music, but

you cannot create it by yourself. You need to have a wish and to enjoy collaborating with people who have different instruments as their passion.

Even if someone else has decided what song we should play, we need to play our own instruments in a comfortable way and in a way that makes people want to listen and enjoy listening. We also want people to join with their unique rhythms, voices and instruments to create the most beautiful piece of orchestral and choir music. The conductor of an orchestra and a choir has a very important role, to stand confident with the goal in his/her mind and heart, to have a vision but supporting the different instruments and voices to play along and collaborate in the best way, to reach each voice's and instrument's but also the whole orchestra's full potential. To do this in a way that everyone involved also can imagine and visualise the goal and how great it will be when we have reached it, to find ways to involve everyone to take a personal responsibility on this journey of co-creation.

Stories of sense-making

Introduction

I will introduce the part of sense-making with a couple of reflections and theoretical connections to the theme of sense-making. Later on the leaders` stories will be viewed as vignettes in the text.

From my view the concept of learning, 'meaning making' is a very complex field and I understand that there is no generally accepted definition of how we can describe learning. It is easy to find a lot of theories and more or less theories as Illeris (2009) points out overlap each other in their definitions.

Lave and Wenger (1991) write that all theories of learning are based on fundamental assumptions of the person, to the world and their relations. From a social constructionist view knowledge is constructed between us. Lave and Wenger highlight a theory of learning as a dimension of social practice. They say that conventional explanations view learning as a process by which a learner internalises knowledge, whether 'discovered', 'transmitted' from others or experienced in interaction with others. This focus can from their view end up leaving the nature of the learner, of the world and of their relations unexplored. Conventional views might also easily construct learning as an unproblematic process of absorbing the given as a matter of transmission and assimilation. They highlight that in contrast with looking at learning as internalisation, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world. If we as the authors suggest conceive learning in terms of participation it enables us to pay attention to ways in which learning is evolving. Learning will evolve as a continuously renewed set of relations consistent with a relational view of persons, their actions and the world. Learning looked upon from the perspective of the authors and a perspective of social practice emphasises the relational interdependency of agent and world activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing. This view also claims that learning, thinking and knowing will be created in relations and interactions between people and from this view arising from the socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially constituted and knowledge

from the socially constituted world is open ended. The authors say that its meaning is given to actors and the relations of humans which from my view invites a never ending process of developed learning dependent on aspects involved in the learning process and its social construction.

Lave and Wenger's thoughts pay an explicit focus on the person but also not as a separate cognitive entity but from the way that learning involves the whole person and his or her surroundings. From this view my thought moves toward that we all have a lot of 'knowledge' within us but within interactions with others and our surroundings we have an opportunity to re-connect, adjust, develop our knowledge but also to add 'new' knowledge and sense-making. This will not be knowledge and sense-making that is totally new because it will be related to my individual pre-understandings.

Peter Jarvis (2006) adds a more existential view on learning and writes that human learning is the combination of process throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person-body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.

The more experienced person that Jarvis talks about would from this view gain a developed sense-making in the present and for the future but he or she will also from the view I would like to highlight have the possibility to view earlier experiences from this new understanding and sense-making. From this view 'learning' and 'sense-making' as phenomena have infinite combination and developmental possibilities. The learning we achieve is from this way of looking never static but dependent on how much we are open for and search for new sense-making and combinations.

I believe that if we develop our ability to look at life with the eyes of wonder, away from the aspects of right or wrong, our sense-making will be able to grow even more. I have made a choice to talk about sense-making as one way of looking at learning. I perceive sense-making as a process from which people give meaning, construct their learning and transform their experiences into consciousness and how they master these new

understandings. In the research my curiosity focused on how leaders transform their experiences appreciatively into useful learning, into something that could guide them in their leadership.

We will visit some parts of their life waves from which they draw connections to their understanding. The study offered a context for the leaders to take a look at and reflect on the weaves they might have woven and the patterns they see. But the process has also encouraged them to new reflections and new sense-making, to enlighten and build new threads in their weaves.

The stories the leaders have told have also been lined by their own curiosity to understand themselves and leadership. My experience is that this curiosity grew during the research. One of the examples of this is one comment after the interview from one of the participants.

It might not be my own answers I will have most help from – I think I will specifically bring the questions with me to be able to think further. (Oscar)

It has become more and more obvious to me through this research that all parts of our lives as human beings, 'our social practices', are fields and meaning-making arenas that give us opportunities to learn, make sense and develop our understanding about ourselves and others. This understanding also influences more or less consciously the way we think and act in our roles as leaders. In the study the participants have had limited time to share and explore how come they understand the way they do and we just get some glimpses. I believe that we all are influenced by life and our experiences to such a high degree that even if we have had more time it would not have been possible to create an analysis that clearly separates parts from each other. One experience and how we make sense of this experience is with great certainty influenced by other experiences. How we have made sense of earlier experiences influences how we experience new ones. How we experience things also differs over time. This has made it difficult to also summarise the themes and patterns that I have found in the analysis. They cannot be seen as separated parts, instead as interwoven parts with no borders.

A first sight of leaders' sense-making

Seeing is believing, or so they say, but I am more than a little convinced that the reverse is equally true, that believing is seeing. How else to account for those people who can be brought to look at an exhibition of blots, squiggles and smears and come away thinking that they see art? Surely someone made them believe before they saw. (Steiner, 1992)

Let's play with the idea that we are to a large extent influenced by what we believe, things we already are convinced by, earlier assumptions and socially constructed meanings. From this way of looking, our way of viewing the world could be seen as very limited. If spots become art because we think they are, we will in a similar way move through life and strengthen our earlier understandings and we will find what we are looking for. We will strengthen our own beliefs. But with the invitation to reflect on our experiences, our experiences will not just be happenings that pass by or experiences that convince ourselves more of what we already believe. Reflections will create space to challenge our own assumptions and to enable new understandings.

I experienced that it was the first time that most of the leaders had had time to reflect on how they have made sense of leadership and how this sense-making influenced them in their leadership. To be able during a short moment to start to reflect over life and influences is not easy but I am convinced that all of them had infinite experiences that probably more or less consciously influenced them in their understanding of leadership. At first sight it also might not be easy to see the relationship between how I understand myself and leadership.

Here is an excerpt from the interview with Gustav:

I believe that I have difficulties to think that I learned so much during my younger years. I think that my learning comes from my many years as a teacher. I believe that it is this which has shaped me and then I have experienced different leaders and I have noticed good sides but unfortunately also many bad sides, this is people who have pointed with their whole hand and not been listening. I have seen result from who is the commander of the ship and what the outcome can be.

When you say commander of the ship, what do you mean?

I end up in a picture with a ship on a sea. There may be storms but we must keep the direction, maybe slipping a bit, but not lose sight of the goal and everyone should be aware of the goal all the time. You should be aware of why we are not on the straight track, you might have to stay for a while in a harbour but always be aware of where to go.

What do you think has influenced you to come to these conclusions?

I guess it is based on the experience I told you about from school settings. I have learned that it is incredibly important to listen to people.

Even if this is a summarised story line from Gustav, it is interesting to notice how he with this 'first sight' rejects learning from childhood and then the experience, which he also honours from being a teacher, is the experience from which he views his understanding about leadership. Teaching seems to have been a great context for reflecting upon leadership but some follow-up questions that would have been interesting to ask are; in what other ways have you learned that it is incredibly important to listen to people? What experiences do you have of being listening to and how has this influenced you? If I had followed with these questions I might have gotten more connections to Gustav´s growing-up.

Lucas didn't either refer to childhood influences in particular, but he highlights his own abilities that have been present from childhood.

How I have made sense? It is a difficult question. How have I understood and learned about leadership? I think I get the feeling that I have had the ability from the beginning. I have always ended up in leadership positions. I was the person in the class who had connections to everyone. I could talk to everyone. I have always had an ability to put myself in other people's situation. I can leave myself behind and listen to others, be present in what they tell. I had a nice relationship with everybody when I grew up. I have had a sort of underlying fascination for people. I think it is genuinely fun to hear others people's stories. I feel that many people, not all but many think it is easy to talk with me about different things. Somewhere I have an ability that enables people to have confidence in me.

When I thought about Lucas' answer afterwards new questions arose. I wish I had asked; ok, when did you first have the experience of the fascination about listening to people? What do you think made you fascinated and what did this experience of fascination do to you? What ability do you think you had that enabled people to trust you and to tell you their stories? And so on.

My reflection is that the interest and curiosity Lucas had must have created a wonderful learning environment and also contributed to his ability to understand different people which in turn nurtured future curiosity and learning. He experienced that different perspectives and stories could live side by side.

The sense I make from the learning above is that it is easy, both as a leader and researcher, to accept the first picture that comes to mind, to accept the generalised picture as if the first view is the answer. It is like if we say that we know the sea from the view of the surface. But even with my curious state of mind I missed interesting learning. When I had time to reflect and think, new curious questions arose. But with these reflections I also realised that to go deep and explore what's below the surface we need to stay for a while. The metaphor of going deeper could be like diving. When we make a choice to dive instead of snorkelling we need to prepare ourselves, to have the right equipment but also to be able to handle what might happen when we go deep, we need to be relaxed and not in a hurry. But we also need to prepare the partner we have by our side. To force someone to dive without permission and the possibility for people to be prepared is from my view unethical.

As a researcher my learning also is that I could have limited the number of participants and limited the questions and got more into detail instead. But we need people's acceptance for the journey we are inviting them into. In-depth interviews require trust and that the context and rules are clear.

All of the participants expressed in different ways that the question how they have made sense was difficult to answer but during the interviews I experienced that their sense-making or could I say consciousness about their sense-making grew in different ways. They started to see things in their own understanding that influenced the way they believed. My assumption is that all of them and all of us learn and make sense from the beginning of our

lives. How we look at and use our 'learning' is dependent on how we understand our learning and if we have an idea that we can learn from them. We might be a little bit scared about exploring the past because we have been influenced to think that we are in a particular way because we have had particular experiences. But from a social constructionist view we also are constructed on a momentary basis with influences from relationships and context, and from how we view and understand ourselves. We will never be static and we always have the possibility to develop our personal resources. The important thing is how I would like to see myself in the future as a leader and how I can use my learning and sense-making in a useful way.

The pattern that developed from their stories of sense-making will be explored under the following headings:

- Wisdom from the past and family culture
- Experiences of values in action
- Role models
- A wish to learn
- Reflections as a source for learning
- Learning by doing

Wisdom from the past and family culture

My past is something that has passed but it lives inside me reaching out for my attention in different ways. The question is how I am able to and want to use earlier experiences and knowledge on my journey into the future. It is inevitable that we bring the past with us but how we think about our past influences how we think about our future (Kicki Oljemark, 2012).

My question to the leaders was about 'positive' experiences from the past. Experiences which they could see had influenced the way they look at people and leadership. Most of the participants more or less expressed that they have had experiences of 'happenings' and wisdom during their growing up that have influenced them.

Below is one example of how I and one of the participants interacted during sense-making connected to the past and how my questions and responses influenced the development of discovering more details. The context created a reflexive space that enabled the participant to find connections that had not been obvious to him. This was a moment when I challenged the first and generalised picture a little more and got a little deeper.

Let's look at Eric and a story of acknowledging what is behind the first picture. When I asked the question of influences from childhood Eric gave me a rather short answer, but this time I decided to challenge this picture and deepen the conversation. On the question of learning from the past and childhood he answered that his parents and specifically his father were very boring. The word boring almost stopped me but fortunately I went on. When I asked him further about how he had been influenced by his parents he went on in a similar way but for each sentence he developed his description. He said:

My parents have not stood out in any specific way; my parents could be described as '*boring*' *but fair. My father has been* '*boring*' *but very fair, he had very high morals. The thing I remember is that there wasn't any better or less good person. My father was very strong in this conviction. This was like a mantra for him, that people are equal.*

When I started to ask follow-up questions about his father's values and how they were shown, Eric told me two stories:

When Eric was about six years of age he was walking in the city with his father. Not so far away from them, a man who had an obvious alcohol abuse fell off his bike. No one close to this man came to his support but Eric's father hurried to his rescue and helped him up from the street. When I asked Eric about what this says about what was important for his father he said that his father valued everyone equally, this was very important for his father. No man is better than another.

Then he told me another occasion when he visited his father's work as a teenager. Eric had work practice at the same company where his father worked and the man he made his practice with told him that his father was unique. When his father started his work in this very high position in this big company with several thousands of employees he went around and shook hands with everyone. This was something they had not experienced before.

I noticed that Eric became touched when he told this story, when he remembered these lovely things about his father and how he could see how his father's values influenced him in his own position of being a manager. I said spontaneously – how nice that you remember and Eric responded directly: 'I am so glad that you asked'. These stories might not have been told if I hadn't been persistent in asking follow-up questions. The story that first was told was about being boring but inside other stories lived. These are two stories of influences from the past that had not been obvious at first sight. The stories show that learning and sense-making from the past can be developed if we look around the corner of our first sight.

At this stage I also gave Eric some feedback about how he might have had a lot more from his parents than he had thought about. Eric then says:

I think it goes back to the two good stories I told about my father, when I think about these stories now it gives a positive effect, I become happy. To talk about these the experiences influenced me to become proud and happy and then something happen, I also grew.

He then went on*:*

If I go even further back my grandfather worked with putting up telephones and he was expert on talking to people, one thing he did that I also am proud of is that he took care of Jewish refugees. He was deported out in the woods for doing this.

It was very obvious that when Eric told and explored the stories about his father and grandfather he became proud; he said it and it was also possible to notice this in his body language and eyes, he became touched. The stories above highlight the importance of being proud of our background and roots and the importance of life giving stories, stories that touch us and make us grow. The skills that the stories reveal from the older generation are wonderful skills to connect to, humbleness, generosity, being fair, being brave, and respect for other people and communicative skills, but we might as I understood Eric not always see the beauty at first sight.

How we understand ourselves could also be viewed in the way of how we experience life and this will also be shown in our communication. According to Pearce (2000, 2002, 2005) and Cronen (1994, 1995, 2008) people construct their social realities while they are engaged in conversations. Pearce and Cronen describe that self could be described as created in stories and these stories could also be seen as guidelines for possible actions. From this view our self can be changed and developed through different stories that we become engaged in or invited to. The two authors highlight that when we take a communicative perspective we look at the communication and what happens in the communication. We look at communication from the view of different processes such as coordinating actions with others and making meaning which is developed through the process. CMM theory developed by Pearce and Cronen is based on three basic aspects which is coherence, coordination and mystery (thus the acronym CMM). Coherence stands for how meaning is achieved in conversations. It could be described as a process in which we tell ourselves and others stories in order to interpret the world around us and our place in it. The concept of coordination highlights that our actions are part of something more than the actual conversation. Through our words and actions patterns will be created and the authors call these patterns stories lived. Coordination involves rules which support individuals in their communication with others. From how I understand these rules they can be more or less constructive in the way people communicate. Mystery stands for that not everything is possible to describe and explain. Mystery also involves the awe of wonder when communication leads to surprising outcome. Pearce and Cronen have also developed a model which they call LUUUTT. This model stands for Stories lived, untold stories, unheard stories, unknown stories, stories told and storytelling. This model can be one way

to understand cultural knowledge and wisdom that has grown from the participants' background. The authors say that stories lived and told vary and how people see or want to see themselves also differ from what they actually do. From the view I understand their ideas unheard stories could be described as stories that I might have missed and failed to hear during the interviews. The stories Eric told about his father could be seen as untold stories and one example of stories not shared. Maybe Eric's story about his father represented stories that had been unheard for a long while and this could have led to that the story of pride was or had become unknown for him. I experienced that his awareness grew when we talked and hopefully also the context allowed this stories to be heard and known. When I reflect on the idea of LUUUTT I get reminded of that when I adapt these thoughts this becomes my subjective analysis of stories I have heard. It would have been interesting to invite the participants understanding and how they might have reflected on these ideas and its usefulness for them to understand their own sense-making.

The Jante law and construction of helpful stories

I experienced that when Eric started to describe himself he judged himself. When I asked him about his reflections from the recorded interview he said that he had thought 'who do you think you are?' when he listened to himself.

The words that Eric used reminded me of other reactions I have seen from other leaders in the research but also in my work as a consultant. How easy is it really to be proud of what we are doing as leaders and how much does our cultural socialisation influence our ability to be proud? Generalisations never show the whole picture but I think that to a greater or lesser degree many Swedish family cultures, in particular families of the middle class, look upon leadership under the influence of a saying referred to as the 'Jante law'.

We have a saying in Sweden called the 'Jante law' that has arisen from a fiction written by a Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose with the translated title 'A fugitive crosses his tracks' first published 1933. This is a story about how society highlights specific rules to live by, inspired by the 30-ies. Sandemose wrote about a series of rules. Rules that might have been quite relevant according to how to handle the First World War in society but this fictional story and its rules started to live their own life and have influenced a lot how we express and regard ourselves in Sweden even today. Maybe the rules resonated with

Scandinavian mentality and values but it also shows the power of conceptualising and giving it a name – the 'Jante law'.

The ten rules state:

1. Don't think you're anything special.
2. Don't think you're as good as us.
3. Don't think you're smarter than us.
4. Don't convince yourself that you're better than us.
5. Don't think you know more than us.
6. Don't think you are more important than us.
7. Don't think you are good at anything.
8. Don't laugh at us.
9. Don't think anyone cares about you.
10. Don't think you can teach us anything.

Whatever background the story has, it has got its own life and these ideas and 'rules' have in many ways influenced the older generation that was born in the 20-ies and 30-ies in Sweden but also following generations. These fictional ideas influence us in the way we speak and think we should speak about our own strengths and abilities. This is also a saying I often find mentioned when I talk with leaders.

During my work as a consultant I have noticed that some organisations are more or less influenced by these sayings depending on organisational cultures and the people in the organisation. This view influences how people understand leadership but also how comfortable leaders are to talk about their own strengths.

I have my own experiences of these ideas from my growing up but also from the lack of conversations I experienced when I worked as a leader. I experienced and still do that it is unusual in meetings with leaders to highlight personal skills and abilities and to highlight professional pride. I believe that ideas about 'who do you think you are' affect many of us and can limit the way we have the possibility to express our interest and passion to lead. The line between genuine passion and to be seen as bragging could be thin if we look from the eyes of the 'Jante law'.

To be bragging in 'top positions' could have another purpose and in these cases bragging might give us a costume that could be helpful and impressive, but this also could be more or less the phenomenon of the emperor's new clothes. People connect the dots into the desired picture depending on what they would like to see. No looking deeper. Then we treat people as if they are what we want to see, what we believe to be seeing. I experience that it is easy that opposite rules and ideas about right or wrong behaviour also grow in our cultural heritage. I experience that conversations also tend to focus more on behaviour than personal development and I believe that these limited conversations lead us toward what is proper to do, how to speak and how to act in the role as a leader.

Nearly all of the participants said that they never talk about leadership at their work place, and some of them excused themselves in different ways for being eager, occupied by their own thoughts or talking too much during the interview.

When I was going to listen to the interview that you had recorded I hesitated, I experience that it is difficult to listen to myself. I am not used to sit like this and talk about leadership and this made me think that I will benefit from saving this recording and also listen to it in the future. (Bo)

Like I said before it felt strange to listen to myself at the recording. It felt a little pompous. When I listened I experienced it a little like, who do you think you are?

How did you experience the interviews?

It is very fun to be in these interviews, it is such fun to be able to talk about myself and my own experiences. And about leadership because I never do this, this is also how come I became self-centred. (Eric)

This could also be connected to not being used to talk about their own ideas and also maybe to the 'Jante law' and 'Who do you think you are?' While I am writing this, I understand more deeply how the research idea and research question has been strongly influenced by my own experiences of this so-called 'Jante law'. I have a wish to highlight the importance of leadership and its possibilities. To do this it is also important to let professional pride grow.

I believe that it is important for everyone to be able to be proud of what they are doing, to be able to talk about things that we enjoy and that make us happy, even leaders.

The 'Jante law' belongs to stories from history and it has influenced our parents, how they have taught us to think and also how we look upon ourselves. The society also shapes who we become.

If we revisit Eric and his, as I experienced it, criticism about himself, the following dialogue developed:

If you should take another view, not being critical about yourself, what would you then be impressed by?

After this encouragement Eric said that he had three things that came up when he listened to himself on the recording. That he need not think anymore that putting out fires needs to be a negative thing. Eric said that I supported him with my questions to lift this up and that he while we were talking got the sense that he needed to put this matter of putting out fires into the strategic planning.

Eric said further that he was frustrated when we met the first time and that he during the interview got the insight how come he was disappointed and frustrated:

Many people react and become angry, I become more disappointed. I can see from my childhood how I have been. I have no difficulties to recognise other people's expertise but I tend to minimise my own. I trust people so when they consciously walk out of the frame, I become disappointed. After the first interview I understood how come I become so incredibly disappointed, how come I overreact to people's weaknesses, I think that it is about moral and honesty. When people don't respect these values it becomes a very big issue for me, bigger than for the other people. (Eric)

So what can we learn from Eric's story? First there is always more to explore and to discover. Things that might make us less curious from the beginning can evolve and involve a lot of meaningful learning and important and life giving stories. Things are not just what they seem to be at the first sight. The story that developed was that Eric has had strong value based childhood experiences that have influenced him. He had experienced values in action which have made an important impact on him. To think about positive stories about his father made Eric feel proud and well. On the other hand the first generalised picture he had about himself from my view was not helpful for him; it put him more in a position of frustration.

It seemed as during the interviews this was also a reflection that Eric had; he said that his understanding about himself and interactions with others grew. He started to reflect on and saw patterns of how come he had reacted emotionally to others' behaviour and what this said about what was important for him. He connected with his values.

I believe that values can come in different shapes and I believe that we might not always recognise them when we look back but this does not mean that seeds have not been planted into the soil to grow. We can also nourish and water these seeds afterwards.

How much our childhood influences us consciously or subconsciously and in what way is unique for all of us and it changes over time. Who we become or how we come to experience ourselves could be noticed in the stories we choose to tell about our life but also from how we act. The main assumption I would like to share is that there are many possible stories. We have a lot to learn from our history, our own sense-making and how we have made sense through interactions with others. How we choose to look at ourselves and our past makes a difference but it is easy to be stuck in old patterns and generalised

pictures of how to understand ourselves or others. How we experience our self but also how we would like to describe ourselves will influence what stories that are possible for us to tell.

I experienced that it gave Eric energy to explore what was important for him in his leadership and also to connect his own beliefs with beliefs of his father and grandfather. The exploration created bridges between himself and his past in a way that made him grow and become grounded.

I think that it is easy to forget the wisdom life experiences have given us and how influential relationships have become a part of creating who we are and how we experience ourselves and our possibilities. I also think that it is easy that experiences we position as negative create clouds on our history and limit our sight of good things we could experience and learn.

Sankofa, one way of valuing the past

When I was going to work in Tanzania for the first time I searched on the internet for African symbols. I was interested to learn more about African cultures and knowledge. One thing I found was the symbol of Sankofa, an ancient African symbol with its roots in Ghana and 500 years back. It means to 'go back and get it' (san – to return; ko – to go; fa – to look, to seek and take). Sankofa is often symbolised as a bird with its head turned backwards taking a golden egg off its back, or with a stylised heart shape. It is often associated with: 'It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten' and highlights the importance of looking for what we might have left behind and value and use this knowledge when we move forward.

Figure 1 - Sankofa

The way I understand the symbol of Sankofa has led me not only in my work but also in the research. To go back for what we have left behind and to what has given us meaning in life is one important field of this research journey. It is not just learning from our childhood but learning and sense-making in general. I find the metaphor of the egg interesting because for me it symbolises that something good could be inside and that this good will grow in the future if it gets the right prerequisites.

I believe that is important to talk about and reflect on leadership to enable careful thought through ways of thinking and acting. It is easy to end up in more or less conscious patterns and old habits and it is easy to react irrationally if we don't understand ourselves and how come we feel like we do in different situations.

I believe that we have a lot of wisdom to find inside ourselves. The life experiences we have, offer us endless learning opportunities. With more experiences we also get more ways to combine our knowledge. From this way of looking, 'new ideas' could be seen as new combinations of, adjustment of, and development of old knowledge. I believe that we can be supported by looking at our background with eyes of wonder and enable ourselves with new insight to open up for new ways of thinking and new possibilities to understand ourselves that we might not have seen.

Experiences of values in action

All the participants mentioned values as an important part of their sense-making of leadership. The values they talked about could both be referred to their history of family culture and influences from parents but also from values developed from their own life experiences and within interaction with other people and through different contexts.

Antonia – A story about values in actions and influences from the past

When I asked Antonia about influences on her leadership from the past she immediately drew parallels to learning from her childhood.

I grew up with a father who had five children and a mother who lived in another country far away from us. I was the youngest one of four girls and one brother. I had to manage by myself and to be flexible in this strange life that included to live in the countryside and then to travel to my mother in the south of Europe. I lived these two lives and I didn't know anything else. Dad was present and a very good role model; he inspired me and wanted us to educate ourselves. At the same time, I longed for my mother who could not live in Sweden because of her poor lungs. My mother also had a man who was a role model for me. I think I learned to be creative in this strange world.

I played a lot by myself and I wrote a lot of poetry. I was very creative as a child. I think that I am shaped by different people that were quite remarkable.

I had to manage by myself early; I had a lot of imagination. It was important that I could take a lot of responsibility myself. My father gave me a lot of responsibility and he believed a lot in me. I've been rather fearless as a person if I think back.

As soon as I started to work I took my own initiatives.

Antonia describes her growing up in a positive way and she makes connections between her experiences as a child and who she is today. She became creative and learned to manage to be by herself. She highlights the learning of taking her own responsibility as an important ability.

Antonia moves on and describes how her experiences have influenced her way of looking at others.

It is important for me to value people, to respect everyone, this is an important value for me, to show respect and in no way consider one to be better.

When I asked her where she thinks she has got these thoughts from she said:

I think it came from my father. My father had a lot of power. We had a lot of woods and fields with many employees. I felt that I had to be very humble in connection to all the power we had. I just wanted to be like everyone else and not be someone in a position of much power. I wanted to play with other children and I was keen on not using the fact that my dad had this power, that the other children's parents were employed by my dad. Just the fact that I went to the south of Europe every summer was odd enough.

Dad always said that it was important for us to be humble and think of other things. We were out with him in the nature, and he gave us articles to read. – Here you have something to think about, he could say. Dad was often included in debates on agricultural politics. He was also out early with environmental issues. I think I got a lot of him not to think that you yourself are especially remarkable. He used his power in a good way.

I tend to think sometimes of how he would have thought. I have followed in his footsteps when it comes to nature and everything.

Antonia's story shows a very strong connection to her father as a role model, how his values have become an important part of her life and her own values. She invites his thoughts in the present, what he might have thought. She describes her family culture as very different from others but that this difference has made her grow and become creative and able to take personal responsibility. It seems like her father lived his values genuinely and truly independently if he approached his children or employees in the role as a leader and man with power. Antonia on daily basis met people that her father worked with and she could experience the difference in how he met people and talked about them. For me her examples also highlight the importance of being true to oneself and to live your values in actions. To be aware of the values we honour and would like to live and how these are

shown in our actions will make a difference. Antonia naturally remembers the good things that her growing up has brought to her life and leadership. It is obvious that it also is a choice she has made how to understand her childhood appreciatively.

Antonia's story shows one example of how we as humans can become strengthened by appreciating our roots, how possibilities and manoeuvring space arise when we find stories that give life and pride. I experienced that Antonia has been reflecting a lot on her background with appreciative eyes. It seems like she can lift herself up and look from a meta-perspective, noticing the patterns in her landscape and how they have influenced her to become the person she wants to be.

More stories and reflections

Let us also listen to a couple of other participants. Here is John:

What has influenced my growing up has been the rather boring Swedish security; this has influenced me as a person and my leadership. I trust people. I have had a safe life, others have other experiences. Justice has influenced me a lot. To try to not favour anyone and that everyone should have a fair chance, these values also come from my growing up.

John moves from the idea of a boring Swedish security to a trust in people but even if he has had a safe life he is aware that others have other experiences and he ends up with the importance of justice. John also used the word boring like Eric in a similar way to describe a context that after a while tends to be something really good. Has the word boring become similar to good in the Swedish vocabulary or is this a way to reformulate a good thing without standing out? The idea of justice also appears in Gustav's story below but he uses other words.

Gustav was as I mentioned above one of the participants who at first sight rejected the idea of finding connection between leadership and learning from his childhood.

It is sad to say but I have not got it from my parents, I have probably got it from someplace else. I think that during my many years as a teacher things have slowly grown. I have met

many different children with different difficulties and different parents, I have been in many different contexts and I have seen a lot.

I also have left wing sympathies and socialist ground values. I shall think about what this has come from. That each person has the same value and words like solidarity are important to me.

I asked Gustav what connections he could see between solidarity and leadership:

It is about that, it has to be something about that all human beings have the right to be listened to, even if we are not good at the same things we are a team and just because someone is better at something does not mean that we are not having an equal value. Everyone can contribute to the anthill, everyone contributes with something.

What difference does this thinking contribute with?

It means that it is very important that no-one ends up left outside and that everyone feels involved and listened to.

Gustav describes a journey of growing values developed from experiences he has had but not particularly from his childhood. It could have been very interesting to explore further if Gustav has had any lived experiences that made him choose this particular political view, a view that makes him highlight justice, the importance of equality and to be listened to.

A dominating and important connection that I heard in all their stories about the past was stories about how values had influenced the way they looked at other people. I also experienced that the leaders who could exemplify concrete examples made the strongest connections of how values in actions and influences from the past influenced the way they looked upon their leadership and how it connected to other people today. I believe that we become influenced more or less consciously by others but I also believe that we make choices also more or less consciously of how we let people influence us. It is easy to make judgements on whether people have influenced us in bad or positive way. My belief is also that if we find ourselves, our core, and are rather comfortable with ourselves, it can be easier to acknowledge influences from others without the risk of losing ourselves. I believe

that this is an area where we develop and find dignity for ourselves and us as important creators of our own lives.

We also might be more or less sensitive about influences during different times in our life, like the little child who is dependent on his or her parents or caretakers. If we are dependent on a person or if a person has power over our being or our action space we could be led toward adaptation or rejection in relation to this influence.

Role models

The phrase role models came up in several of the interviews and probably most of us have experienced important influence by people that we could call role models.

All of the participants except one mentioned how particular persons had influenced their ideas about leadership, how they have noticed 'role model's actions and learned from how their actions had made a difference to people in the organisations 'I have seen the difference who has been leading the ship' Gustav says. The participants talk about good leaders as role models but also of parents. Here is Gustav again:

I have had my own experiences of different managers and I have been influenced by different leaders. Unfortunately I have thought that most of them haven't been good but there have been some of them that have had warmth, empathy and being clear about how to run the organisation. They have been warm, secure and harmonic people. They were people that could be very serious in their work but also have a relaxed way of walking in and out of the role as a leader.

Anna was very enthusiastic when she talked about leadership. She used words like passion in her descriptions and talked a lot about looking for possibilities. When I asked her about leadership she said:

I think it is very fun with leadership and how it is possible to influence from my own position. I have to be driven by passion and things I believe in. For me there are no problems, there are just situations to solve.

When I asked her where she had got these ideas from she answered:

I think that I have got it from home. My father had his own company and he was very possibility focused. He said to me, and what are you going to do about it Anna? I am incredibly possibility focused and I think that I spread this around me.

Anna´s story highlights her father as someone who influenced and inspired her how to think and act in a way that she also feels comfortable with. But he also seemed to challenge her in ways that enabled her to get new learning and grow.

I also would like to introduce Mattias, the youngest of the participants but already with a lot of experiences. Mattias told me that the best thing he knew was to stand and talk to people and to experience that if he talked to people in a good way it would make them feel good about themselves and grow. He said that it sometimes is even possible to see how people start to glow during a conversation.

When I asked him about what connections he could see between his interest in leadership and his growing up he said that:

My father has also led a company for a long time and he has had a leading position within athletics, my mother is a social worker. I believe that I have had this with me in the baggage.

When I asked Mattias further about what conclusions he had made about the most important influences from his parents and learning from them he said:

It is about choosing one's words right. I cannot say the same thing to my salespeople as to my friends. I cannot be sarcastic. My mother and father are also interested in how to live a happy life and to care about other people. I think that I have got it with me that I really care about other people. If I care about another person and make his or her day much better, it also will influence positively and the company will improve.

Mary made similar connections and when I asked her what have been important influences she said. 'Of course my mother, father and sister, they are absolutely involved in this perspective. '

Then Mary and I had the following conversation:

Is there anything specific that you have brought from your childhood that others can get glimpses of?

It is probably my mother a lot I think. She is that kind of person who has a mixed group of friends and people around her; people from different directions and different backgrounds. She worked as a district doctor, and many people knocked on our door, she was very much appreciated and this is part of the humanity she brought forward to me.

Mary continued:

This is a very exciting question, I think that me and my sister probably always have lived in the way that it is important to be nice and fair to others: I think that it is also possible to as sisters create values between ourselves.

One thing that came to my attention was how the participants experienced that role models had given them guidance in their way to live their values. One thing that could be interesting to explore further is how specific people come to have more impact on us as individuals than others. What kind of relationships and contexts constitute how we become influenced? If we revisit the idea that our world view more or less consciously influences how we understand our surroundings and experiences, then the view we take on people also influences how we allow ourselves to become influenced and to what degree. To what degree have we transformed influences and experiences to a consciousness that enables us to think and act independently? Or how much are we stuck in unconscious patterns?

I don't think that we can copy anyone else and I don't think we should try either, I believe that leadership benefit from being genuine and personal. But I think we all could benefit from increasing our own awareness of what influences how we think and act and at the same time reflect on how we would like to use these influences. How can we make active

choices of what to bring with us on our personal and professional journey? From this view I believe that both good and negative experiences can influence and more or less limit our independence.

A wish to learn

During the last 10-15 years learning has become the key topic in many fields (Illeris, 2009). Learning is generally described as a very complex matter and I have not found one overall definition. But if we look at learning as I have mentioned before to adjust and develop earlier 'knowing', the will and one's own wish to learn from my understanding becomes very important. When I asked Anna about what she thought when she listened to the recorded interview about how she had learned, she told me following story.

Wow, it is a very difficult question. I don't know but I think that the honesty toward myself and honesty toward my children. It is important for me to show that I am a good role model. I want to be a good role model in the things I do and the choices I make. I also would like to be this for my employees. I have had a secure upbringing. I have travelled a lot and met a lot of people. I have lived in the east where people didn't dare to speak out. Mainly it has given me learning about understanding other people. Everyone doesn't have it in the same way.

Things I think that have mainly influenced me have been that I have been brought up in an athletic family. It has been fun but a rather tough jargon, I had to hang in if I should be able to join. This has taught me a lot about how to handle different people.

What has this competition given you?

I seldom give up; I think that that constitutes me a lot. The competitive spirit has influenced me to not give up.

You said that your sickness also had influenced you?

Yes, I got new perspective when I became ill. It is absolutely an important part. You live but the work is not everything, to take care of each day and to be in the present. My father died

early and I think that you should not leave things to be done in the future. You should not wait to do things you would like to do. When I was sick my life circulated around living in the moment. To change my perspective has influenced me a lot and to enjoy the moment.

What do you think it is that influences how you learn from your life experiences?

I think that it is a lot about if you are possibility focused or problem focused. When I became ill I had to decide to move on. I decided after a couple of years to leave the sickness behind, it was done, it is nothing I talk about, I am well today and I don't need to talk about the sickness over and over. I want to see the possibilities, not the problems.

Anna´s story highlights that learning can come from very different places; it depends on how we actively want to learn from these experiences and the view we take on the experiences we have had. We can learn and get new views from living in different countries, from how our growing up has been and from different life experiences, difficult ones and nice ones.

The concept of learning includes many complex matters but one important theme that I found was the actual wish to learn. From my view, our wish to learn and the approach we have in relation to our own learning, will to a high degree become influenced by our understanding. My world view invites me to experience different things. What will happen and what I will learn depends on if I look for new experiences and if so what kind of experiences I look for, or if I look for aspects that will enhance understanding which is already there. It will make a huge difference if I look for learning that will develop my leadership, challenge my taken-for-granted ideas and views and for learning that can support my organisation and its members to give their best.

Just sitting these two coactions have made me to reflect more; I became strengthened and will go out from this room strengthened in my role. I have experienced this like a learning context and education. I experience that leadership also involves my personal development and how I can live my values I was frustrated when we met. What I became aware of when we met was how come I became frustrated and disappointed. Many people react and become angry. I become more disappointed and I can see patterns from my childhood how I have been reacting. I have a tendency to acknowledge others expertise but not my own. I

have a basic trust in people. When they consciously provoke or go outside the frame I become disappointed. After the interview I became aware of how I can overreact on human weaknesses. This is all about morals and honesty. When this is not shown in collaboration it can become a big issue for me. I also think it became clear in the interview that leadership is not about black or white. It is not possible to follow a leadership book to become a good leader. It is a matter of my own way of thinking, acting about values and interactions. (Eric)

I was impressed by all the stories I found around the wish to develop oneself and also in relation to being able to support the members of the organisation in the best way. Like in Eric's examples he reflects a lot about how he can understand others and how he can develop his own approach related to people he interacts with.

Reflection as a source for learning

In many ways all the interviews and this thesis could be seen as a reflective act. Maturana (2004) writes that 'there must be a distinction in order to see anything at all'. This sentence could be seen as highlighting the importance of looking at our experiences from different viewpoints and from different backgrounds of understanding.

I experienced all the participants as more or less reflective. Their wish to learn has driven them toward developed understandings and new insights about themselves and others. Roger had the experience of being brought up in another country and he seems to have very actively used his experience of moving into new cultural contexts as learning opportunities. One thing that becomes very obvious in his story is also that he has experienced that he cannot take the spoken words for granted, that he needs to explore what people mean and also to be clear with his message. Roger told me the following:

I try to learn each day. I read a lot and I analyse pretty much. I am a person that tries to think this way. Each day I hear and see things in my role as a leader (manager) that I can learn from to develop my leadership. Some things are very difficult to explain, it could be that my background from another country influences my way of thinking. I have for example learned that it is very important that the message comes through and I always come back to: do you understand what I mean, has my message come through?

Roger has experiences of learning a new language to be able to understand and to be understood. He has had a need to explore what people mean when they say certain things and he cannot count on being understood. Roger has actively made a choice to reflect on how it is possible to understand language and prerequisites for successful communication. Through reflections he has learned that it is important to be clear and to check if people have understood. My experience was that Roger had successfully used a lot of experiences and transformed them into meaningful understanding that he and others could benefit from in his leadership. He also shared one example of how he has reflected on the similarities in leadership and football.

To enable the team to give its best we need to start before the match when people are changing in the dressing room, to enable them to get the encouragement and spirit so that they can get out there and be able to give their best. They get a sense of belonging to the whole.

Roger gave me different examples of how he had made this distinction and used different experiences for new learning. His wish for constant learning was very obvious and I experienced that his curiosity to learn and to understand new perspectives also was one of his driving forces.

When I draw a parallel to a social constructionist perspective and how we are created in language, the experience of changing language could be a marvellous eye opener that enables different views. We who are more stuck in the way we use language and our words as if the way we use a particular word is the truth, might not give ourselves as many possibilities for reflection as people who learn new languages and move into 'new' cultures. But this does not mean that we haven't a lot to learn; each word spoken and each individual's lived culture is worth learning more about. Each meeting gives us endless reflection possibilities. Leadership could be seen as a never ending process of learning and reflection.

The action of reflection that arose in the interviews could from my view be seen as a conscious choice to view things from different perspectives – a wish to learn. If we, as we have been talking about before, view leadership as a process based on our own personal development and interactions with others, a wish to learn becomes crucial. This includes

for example to actively look for new things, new learning, to actively do new things, to be brave in challenging ourselves and our own views.

I asked Bo what it is that drives him toward on-going learning and he said:

I don't know. I think that to learn is a way of living, what's fun about life.

Lucas answered the question of how he has made sense in the way that he thought that he had had the ability from the beginning but he then developed his reflections. He also said;

I am very curious and it takes the most hilarious forms sometimes.

Lucas moves on and describes how he continuously tries to get new impressions and find ways to develop his mind. He highlights the aspects of doing something different as one of the most important driving forces for his own development. This could also be connected to the distinction that Maturana (2004) talks about. But to do something different is not enough. It is also to be open for what new learning this difference can contribute to. Lucas continues:

When we go to the country, we can drive new roads, or when we walk, we take new paths and see new things.

What do these constantly new experiences do to you?

It is very clear. This gives me new impressions. It feeds me. I have an ability to feel good when I develop, to see and experience new things. To walk or drive new ways and to be observant of what I see and how it looks. I have always been curious. It has given me an ability to think. I also find it extremely stimulating to talk about different things. It gives me energy.

I think that the idea of difference is the main contribution to my development. As a person you can have different feelings against things that are different, some people might have the idea that different is weird, others think it is ok and others that different is pretty good. I seek out for what is different, because I want what is different. The things that are different

contribute a lot. The things that are different are good. I need to move outside my own box to look for things that are different.

Whether you are a leader or follower it always begins with the individual. It always starts with the individual, with you as a person. We have our different perspectives on life and we need to respect this. The driving force in me is that I must take responsibility for myself. (Lucas)

Lucas highlights that he is looking for new experiences and new learning and that this feeds him. He also connects this curiosity to the ability to think. He also highlights learning and reflection as a choice.

Peter Senge (2003) writes that we live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested. We adopt those beliefs because they are based on conclusions which are inferred from what we observe, plus our past experience.

Senge draws our attention to 'The reflexive loop' that was first published in William Isaacs' (1992) working paper, the Ladder of Inference, and it shows how we as humans make assumptions, draw conclusions and also from this take actions. The Ladder of Inference describes the thinking process that we go through, usually without realising it, to get from a fact to a decision or action.

The Ladder of Inference was first put forward by organisational psychologist Chris Argyris and used by Peter Senge in The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation.

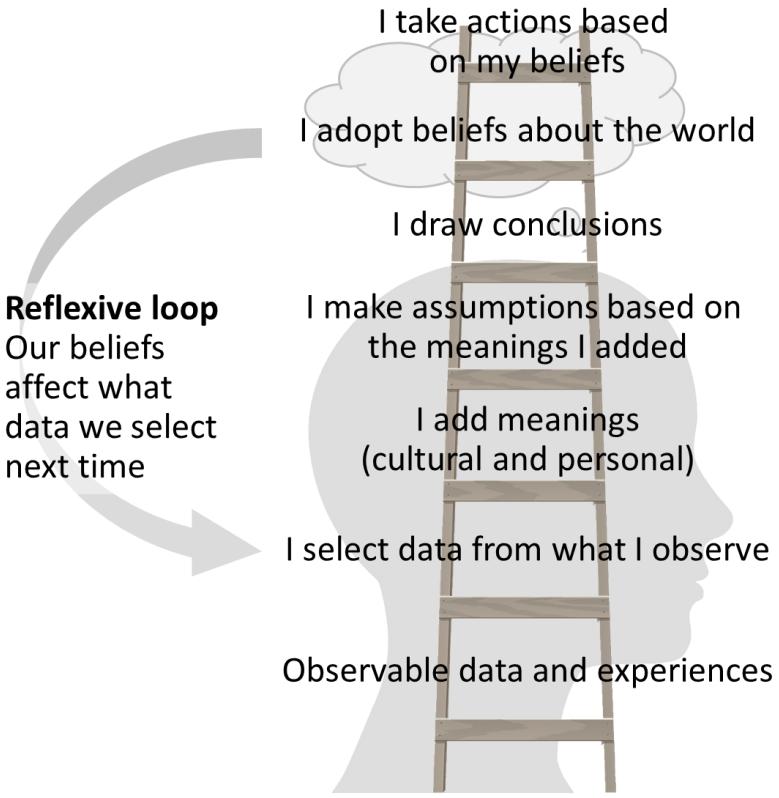


Figure 2 - The Ladder of Inference

Senge writes that we cannot live our life without adding meaning and drawing conclusions but we can improve our communication through reflections and by becoming aware of our own thinking and reasoning (reflection). He also says that we can develop our communication by making our thinking and reasoning more visible to others. He highlights the importance of inquiring into others' thinking and reasoning.

Illeris (2009) has come to the similar conclusions and he says that we develop some general pre-understandings within certain thematic areas, and when one meets with influences within such an area these pre-understandings are activated. He suggests that if elements in the influences do not correspond to the pre-understandings, they are either rejected or distorted to make them agree. He writes further that in both cases this may result in no new learning but on the contrary often the cementing of the already existing understanding. Illeris moves on and writes that thus through everyday consciousness we control our learning and no learning in a manner that seldom involves any direct positioning

while simultaneously involving a massive defence of already acquired understandings and, in the final analysis, our very identity.

Illeris highlights the view that we might reject experiences that are not consistent with our own beliefs. To be able to interpret new understandings, then to challenge our old ones, from my view the choice becomes crucial, the will to look for other views and understandings.

If we, as Maturana (2004) says, need to make a distinction, the idea of the reflective process too could be seen as offering this distinction. To experience something new we need to look at old experiences in a new light or from a new angle. By making our thinking and reasoning more visible to ourselves and others we are encouraged to put words on our meaning making processes and through these words our understanding also will grow. The curiosity for others' thinking and reasoning also offers us a field to make a distinction and to challenge our own understanding and experiencing new things.

Maturana highlights that the real wisdom of a person does not consist in perpetual self-examination but in the capability of reflection, in the willingness to give up those beliefs, which stand in the way of an accurate perception of specific circumstances. Observing is from Maturana´s view a human operation that requires language together with awareness that one is engaged in observing something. Observers act in self-awareness, when they use a distinction in order to distinguish something; they are mindful when they see and perceive something. The way I understand Maturana is that the distinction itself is important to become self-aware and that the mindfulness could be seen as a reflection about what we perceive and how it is possible to be understood.

Morgan (1993) also writes that people in everyday life tend to get trapped by their perspectives and assumptions. As a result we construct, understand and interpret the social world in partial ways, creating interesting sets of insights but obliterating others, as ways of seeing that become ways of not seeing

John Shotter (2005) in his turn to Bateson's (1972) terms; it's the difference that makes the difference that matters. 'It is this unique transitory understanding, that gives us a sense of where we stand in relation to others around us and action guiding anticipation (that gives

us a sense of where we might go next, in relation to them) that gives us an orientation in expressing our own unique, once off creative responses to them' (Shotter, 2005).

This difference connects to Maturana's distinction and that to be able to see anything at all we might need to change the background from which we view. Dewey (1933) in his turn argued that reflective processes cannot be separated from some sort of event called experience.

So it follows that reflective practitioners use experiences as their raw material for learning. This statement also once more puts Senge's use of Argyris' ladder into account because we must be aware of if what we experience is more of the same or if we challenge our own assumptions. When we do differently, we experience new things, when we get new responses we can learn from these responses. When we experience that we can make a positive difference it creates more hope and we become more relaxed and brave and then this supports us to go on challenging ourselves to increase even more learning and a more conscious leadership.

Learning by doing – the ability to learn by reflecting on experiences

When I asked John during the second interview how he had learned he said:

I will say the same thing again as I said the first time, it is a very difficult question, you learn by experience. You can learn some in education and a short while afterwards you try to apply this but they disappear and you are yourself again but hopefully a little bit wiser. The way to learn is learning by doing, to experience that the people around me think that my way of working works. I have not experienced complaints but new situations appear all the time and you learn from them.

Could you give some examples of learning situations?

It is different things that happen all the time that forces me to react and reflect. It could be things that people are not satisfied with. I think that all those kinds of situations are great

learning opportunities. Then it could be things that influence like the economy or new things to handle etc.

John expressed his main learning as based on learning by doing; he also tells me that even though he gets inspired by courses this inspiration is easy to forget after a while when you get back to work. He comments that he looks for responses. In this way he invites a reflexive process where he learns from the responses he receives. He adjusts his leadership and approaches in a way that will benefit the employees and organisation. If we acknowledge that there are different learning styles we could also say that it is John's reflexive abilities and the way he has the ability to adapt his resources to different situations and relationships that becomes his main learning resource.

Bo expresses a similar experience as John and he told me that he learns by experiences of what works. To be able to do this we need to look for others' responses.

You create it by doing things in collaboration with others all the time, and to get experiences. It is important to do things and to not just talk. When you do things, things happen.

All the participants mentioned that they in different ways have learned by experience, by doing. If we take John's and Bo´s reflections into account, learning by doing could be seen as a reflexive process when it comes to the craftsmanship of leadership. They get responses to their actions, 'something happens', that in turn influences their learning and develops their approach as leaders. They highlight that the learning happens between us and the people we meet but it is also dependent on a reflective process; that we are consciously looking for learning.

You create learning through doing things in collaboration with others all the time. To do things all the time and to get experiences. It is important to do things and to not just talk. When you do things, things happen. From the responses and expectations you get from others you get the picture that they think you can do this and then you create a picture of yourself that you become a person that can do this.(Bo)

It is important to be brave and to learn together. The employees need to be and feel that they are involved. It is what we do together which will makes the difference. (Antonia)

All of the participants highlight the aspects of learning together and in collaboration. This also strengthens the idea that Lave and Wenger (1991) address, that learning is a participatory process. From this view we also need experience from doing things to fully understand that action and reflection are intertwined. When we do things, things happen.

Cooperrider are Whitney (2005) write that human knowledge and organisational destiny are interwoven. We are constantly involved in understanding and making sense of people around us. From their view constructionism is an approach to human science that replaces the individual with the relationship as the locus of knowledge. Aspects of expectations also become important, if our wish to learn is oriented toward what we think is expected by us or toward our own personal development and ability to lead ourselves and others.

I believe that positive expectations make a difference in what we do and this will also influence our learning possibilities when we learn by doing. Before we do things we probably have an idea that this is possible for us to do or someone else thinks we have the potential to do this. In the Pygmalion effect, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) show that expectations on students have a huge influence on their results and that students whom teachers think are smart become smarter. This could be a parallel to what Bo says that 'I learn from the responses and by the expectations I get from others. I get the picture that they think I can do this and then I create a picture of myself that I am person that can do this.'

The Pygmalion effect highlights that when people have positive expectations of us, this increases our ability to live up to these expectations.

Lave and Wenger (1991) say that learning viewed as situated activity has as its central defining characteristic a process that they call legitimate peripheral participation. By this they draw our attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners. This refers both to the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to reproduction and transformation of communities of practice. Their thoughts remind me that the learning will be created on different levels. When I do something

different as a leader and learn from the responses and results, I have the possibility to learn, but my activities will also influence others' possibilities to learn from their interactions with me. The way I act will make them experience themselves in different ways. Learning from our interactions and doing will create a learning culture in the organisation and influence organisational learning in a wider meaning. We will construct new meaning together.

Making sense of leaders' sense-making

As mentioned earlier, learning is a very complex matter. Illeris (2009) points out that learning theory today covers a large field that also includes emotional and social dimensions.

The choice of a systemic and constructionist view invites us into knowledge as an active construction and it could from this view be described as created in the moment. Crotty (2003) also highlights the active aspects of learning and writes that knowledge of the world is not acquired in a passive way; instead knowledge is acquired through our engagement with the world. Meaning is ours to make; it is not out there to discover. To engage with the world and with one another then means to construct meanings from our experiences. Crotty says that knowledge development involves complex cognitive processes: perception, communication, association and reasoning; while knowledge is also related to the capacity of acknowledgement in human beings. He says that the objects of our investigations cannot be described apart from our relationship with them.

From this view meaning emerges as we interact with our world. This view also has a major influence on social constructionist research and its implications. If we as humans construct meaning within interactions with others, and if meaning is constantly emerging, then our sense-making, knowledge development from my view, could be seen as a process. From this perspective there is no static understanding or knowledge. The way we uniquely interpret and understand in the present emerges from earlier and present meaning making processes but also influenced by dreams and hope of the future. We can look back at earlier experiences with new experience and create new learning.

Leaders make decisions within complex systems involving many parameters. Schantz (2008) says that variables of decisions often are unclear and multifaceted. When uncertainty arises, leaders may feel out of their comfort zone. However, uncertainty is often a leader's best indicator that new information, the not yet known may be present. Instead of shrinking from risk-related fear or avoiding discomfort, leaders have another choice. The leaders choose mind shift and learning. If fear is interpreted as excitement, it will serve leaders as motivation for learning and exploration.

Illeris (2009) highlights two basic processes and two dimensions of learning. The first important condition is that all learning implies the integration of two very different processes, namely an external interaction process between the learner and his or her social, cultural or material environment, and an internal psychological process of elaboration and acquisition. The content dimension concerns what is learned. This is usually described as knowledge and skills but also other things like opinions, insight, meaning, attitudes, values, ways of behaving, methods, strategies etc., things that contribute to building up the understanding and capacity of the learner. The endeavour of the learner is to construct meaning and ability to deal with the challenges of practical life and thereby an overall personal functionality is developed.

The incentive dimension provides and directs the mental energy that is necessary for the learning process to take place. It comprises such elements as feelings, emotions, motivation as well as the cognitive process by which an individual decides on and commits to a particular course of action (volition). Its ultimate function is to secure the continuous mental balance of the learner and thereby it simultaneously develops a personal sensitivity. Illeris says that these two dimensions always are initiated by impulses from interaction processes and integrated in the internal process of elaboration and acquisition. Therefore the learning context is, so to speak, always 'obsessed' with the incentives at stake, whether learning is driven by desire, interest, necessary or compulsion.

It is not easy to say from the conclusions that Illeris makes what it is that triggers the most desirable learning context for managers. But the thing that particularly has caught my attention during this process is our ability to reflect on our experiences and understand our learning. The question is also what pre requisites enable us to be comfortable to reflect upon ourselves and our interactions with others. What space do we allow ourselves to

reflect and learn in a way that will be useful for us in our leadership and for the success of the organisation? I think that to have a curiosity toward new learning and how we approach our own learning abilities are important parts of the profession of leadership.

During this journey it has become very clear to me that our sense-making is both a process of constructing who we are, and how we perceive ourselves and others but on the other hand who we are also influences and constructs how we make sense. Our sense-making is intertwined with our being and becoming in an infinitive process.

Tolmach Lakoff writes (2006) that once, not all that long ago, human identity was generally viewed rather simply. It was assumed that identity achieved its final form in the course of childhood and adolescence.

In recent years, studies of identity have radically changed the picture. Recent studies see human identity as a continual work in progress, constructed and altered by the totality of life experiences. De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006) highlight the fact that human identity involves many other categories. They write that identity is constructed in complex ways, more or less consciously and over time.

From this view it is not possible to as a leader reach a final form; leader identities are constructed more or less consciously over time in an on-going process.

Bateson (1972) gives us a metaphor that I find useful and he writes about the artist and that the sensations and qualities of skill never can be put into words, and yet the fact of skill is conscious. He says that the artist's dilemma is of a peculiar sort. He must practise in order to perform his job, but the practice always has a double effect. It makes him, on the one hand, more able to do whatever it is he is attempting; and on the other hand, by the phenomenon of habit formation, it makes him less aware of how he does it.

Bateson's thoughts view the importance of reflecting on what we do and how we interact continuously and maybe particularly when we think that we know and work on routine. The routine we have learned and the generalisations we make are mostly very helpful but there is a risk that we end up working on autopilot. The autopilot can be helpful but we need to

be aware that it also limits our understanding and our ability to adapt to different situations.

The question is how we view ourselves and how we would like to view ourselves. To be able to see ourselves in new ways we need to challenge the idea that that this is how we are. I am not comfortable with describing people as having dominant styles even if this is one way of describing. I believe that we humans have the ability to use and develop ourselves in different ways and we all have skills which some could benefit from or be further developed to give balance to our leadership. But we also need to use ourselves in different ways with regard to different people we meet and different contexts. The question becomes how I can use myself in the best way.

From my understanding to be able to learn new things, to adapt and adjust our earlier knowing we need to be able to connect the new experience and learning to what we already know. We need to have bridges that connect different sense-making, making it meaningful and understandable for us. But we also need to look for these bridges and have a wish to walk over these bridges with a curiosity about what we can learn. We need to actively interpret different new meanings and understandings. From this view, reflections can give us space to transform our experiences into both consciousness but also into new learning.

Research also shows that curiosity could be seen as the driving force for development. It is the curiosity that drives us to explore, try and learn. Willingham (2010) notes that managers often could be very eager to know the answer so that they don`t give themselves time to develop the question. He says that if we get an answer our curiosity will be less. This statement invites both the aspects of inviting others' curiosity but also to be curious as a leader to find out other`s views and knowledge.

Curiosity in the view of Loewenstein (2008) needs basic ground knowledge within the subject. People are not curious about things we do not know anything about. When we know something a little our curiosity will increase.

Loewentein says that our intellectual capital often describes a human's ability to think beyond what we already have learned, and to meet problems with optimism, flexibility, and

creativity, to be innovative and to have a wish to learn new things. The thing that often stands out with children is their curiosity.

Curiosity becomes important and to think beyond our own experience. The term experience helps us to think through such matters as an individual leader's sense-making while also understanding that his or her sense-making also takes place with other people and in relations with others. Our learning opportunities are endless.

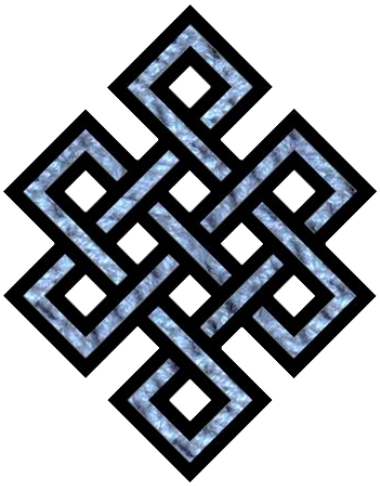


Figure 3 - The Endless Knot

The endless knot is an ancient symbol that has been described as representing interweaving of our spiritual path, the flowing of time and the movement within which is eternal. One of the interpretations of the endless knot is said to be the inter-twining of wisdom and compassion but it has also been used as a symbol for the union of wisdom and method (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2012).

This could also be a symbol for endless learning and the importance of compassion related to developing wisdom and also how knowledge and action are intertwined. How we make sense once more becomes complex in a way that it is not possible to fully understand or describe. With the endless knot in our mind we can be reminded that we have potentials to experience new things and to develop.

Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a dimension of social practice. They say that conventional explanations view learning as a process by which a learner internalises knowledge, whether 'discovered' or 'transmitted' from others. This focus leaves the nature of the learner, of the world and their relations unexplored. They say that it can only reflect far reaching assumptions concerning these issues. According to the authors this establishes a sharp dichotomy between inside and outside. If we conceive learning in terms of participation this will focus our attention to that learning is an evolving, constantly renewed set of relations. The authors highlight that a theory of social practice emphasises the relational independency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing. Learning and thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity with and arising from a socially and culturally structured world. Knowledge of the socially constituted world is socially mediated and open ended.

As I have described before all of the leaders described in different ways a wish to reach out for new learning and experiences that will develop their understanding and skills.

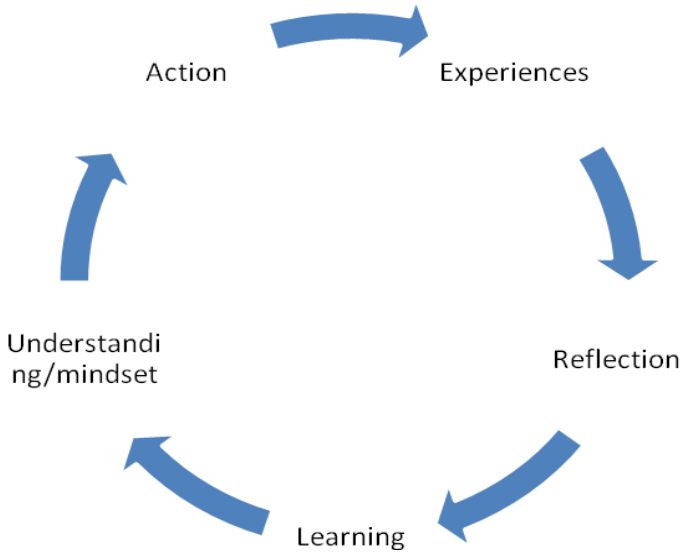


Figure 4 - Circle of Sense-Making

If we address the idea again that our understanding is influenced by the language we use, our limited conversations and language also could be seen as limiting our understanding.

From this view dialogues with both myself as a leader but also with others about leadership become very important and could give us endless of learning opportunities.

When we look back with curious eyes coloured by new experiences, our past will come into new light and we will experience something new. When we look at the present and the future with these new experiences in our mind, we will experience life in a new light which also will give us new experiences that are intertwined with how we understand our past. (Kicki Oljemark, 2013)

To be able to understand the leaders' possibilities we will first visit how they look upon the idea of an optimal organisation and how it can be noticed.

Perceptions of the optimal organisation

Introduction

The idea of the optimal organisation gives us a view of how what leadership should contribute to and in this case what the participating leaders perceive. What are they heading toward? What do they experience as important to enable organisations and people in organisations to give their best? From this view they also became invited into how they can influence in the best way.

The idea of an optimal organisation invites relative aspects because the most favourable or desirable could be different things for different leaders and for all the members in the organisation. People have different understandings, contexts are different and situations shift over time, organisational arrangements also have to be modified. What is optimal becomes in the eyes of the beholder.

Most of the literature I have found in the field views the idea of structures to organise optimal organisations. Maybe the question of what is an optimal organisation and how it is noticed shows a huge interesting gap in how we understand and approach organisations and look at the phenomenon of the optimal. Is it about how we structure or design and what these structures create or do we take the view of how we would like the optimal organisation to be noticed and how we can achieve this? To be able to explore how the leaders thought that they could influence their organisations to work optimally, the first natural step became to explore how they viewed the idea of an optimal organisation.

I start with some words from Lucas:

An optimal organisation is a context where people are comfortable. People also become more profitable if they enjoy themselves, if you can be a part of influencing, if you are listened to, are seen and confirmed on all levels. Everyone needs to be confirmed.

Lucas highlights interesting views of the nature of an optimal organisation; that it is shown in the way people experience it, an experience of, for example, being comfortable, enjoying, and sensing that I have the possibility to influence. These thoughts connect to the idea of on-going meaning-making processes in organisations and that it is in the beholder we can find the answers. The optimal organisation is not a fixed status quo. He also highlights that people's experiences are dependent on how people are approached, listened to, seen, confirmed etc. From this view the optimal organisation is an organisation where people are approached in a way that makes them feel good about themselves. He also connects the optimal organisation to get the best out of people – he says that people become profitable if they enjoy what they are doing and that is connected to how they feel about themselves in the organisation.

It was possible to find many interesting themes in the different interviews. I made a choice to look at similarities to get one picture of how an optimal organisation could be noticed as a generalised picture.

Below will follow some themes that I experienced stood out:

- Clarity and knowing the direction
- Choice, engagement and responsibility
- Collaboration and joy

Clarity and knowing the direction

To be able to do your job and be satisfied, and to enjoy being a part of the whole, you need to know the mission, what direction you are expected to head toward and expectations. The leaders' descriptions highlight once more the importance of a clear mission but from a new angle, with particular focus this time on clarity in the whole organisation and for everyone as a sign of and enabling an optimal organisation.

One sign of an optimal organisation could from the leaders' view be simply this, people know the direction. Gustav says:

The employees know the direction. It makes a huge difference that people know where we are heading. If we are travelling in the same direction and everyone is engaged in the same goal it gives energy. If not, it is easy that the organisation's energy drops. It is easy to get into a side track; it is important to always reconnect to: is this our mission?

Gustav points out the relationship between clarity and that when everyone is engaged in the same goal it creates energy.

An optimal organisation is a group of people who are working together toward a specific goal. There is also clarity in what to do or not. People don't need to keep thousands of balls in the air all the time and they can focus on something and not just be frustrated; they know what to do. [As previously quoted] I end up in a picture with a ship on a sea. There may be storms but we must keep the direction, maybe slipping a bit, but not lose sight of the goal and everyone should be aware of the goal all the time. You should be aware of why we are not on the straight track, you might have to stay for a while in a harbour but always be aware of where to go.

To be able to relax and do our work in a satisfying way we need to know in what direction we are heading and what is expected from us. Gustav draws parallels with knowing the direction and working together and how this creates engagement toward the goal and also gives energy. This clarity also raises the importance of being safe and to have trust. The aim to have a clear direction addresses that if people know where they are heading and what's expected from them, they can be trusted to contribute in their unique way and they can be safe to explore their own manoeuvring space to contribute in their best way.

Choice, engagement and responsibility

A clear focus on the mission and the task becomes a main sign of the optimal organisation in the leaders' descriptions. As Gustav highlighted, direction, engagement and responsibility are connected but there is also a choice to take if we would like to join. The clarity enables people to make an active choice whether or not to take part in the mission but also to make a choice on a momentary basis.

In the similar way that I found that the leaders' choice to lead was important, also the employees' choice to take part becomes crucial and Antonia is first out:

An optimal organisation is an organisation where the employees are engaged in the task, there is competence and people are trying to find solutions. (Antonia)

An optimal organisation is very well taken care of and if there is something that could be done even better people would strive for that. (John)

These aspects also include an individual responsibility toward the goal of the organisation. Here's Bo:

It's a place where people take their work and task seriously and have the goal in the focus. Then I see that people take responsibility. (Bo)

People take initiative to pursue issues and that people do this independently, we get good results and get credit. It will be noticed in nice words from the customer, nice treatment and it is great fun. It will be noticed, people are willing and proactive. It is a working situation where we can act and not become so event driven. (Mary)

An optimal organisation is shown by the issues we spend time on, if we devote time to conflict and friction or if we devote time to the business? (Lucas)

To have a wish to take responsibility probably to a high degree is influenced by how we experience our working place; look at ourselves and our task. Do we experience it as meaningful? From this view the optimal organisation also is shown in engagement. Here's Bo:

I think that it will be noticed in the atmosphere of the group and how people handle their tasks and in our case also how they treat our clients. (Bo)

People enjoy and are happy at work; they can see that things are happening and a result from the things they are doing. People try new things, they have the opportunity to try new things and notice that it works. (Gustav)

I notice it in the mood of the group and above all that the things people are responsible for are working. (Mattias)

When I try to summarise the stories I have heard about optimal organisations I have found that the focus for people's engagement in their working place is a decisive factor, the things people are doing and the issues they spend time on. The next reflection is that the focus is combined with words connected to action oriented emotions like being devoted, engaged and taking things seriously, taking responsibility, but also connected to positive emotions like being happy and joyful. The quotes also show active responsibility. This also could suggest an active choice to focus on the task of the profession.

The view of the optimal organisation becomes a view of an organisation where everyone is task oriented and gives their best toward the goal, an organisation with people who wish to take part and to give their best. It is an organisation where compassion is connected to the task and where the manoeuvring space allows people to contribute in their best way.

The participants' stories also highlight the importance of collaboration and co-creation and the energy that comes from being involved in the overall goal. The act of collaboration also shows how people invest with their engagement and energy. Lucas also contributes with another angle:

It is noticed because people would like to put time and spend their energy and power into it and that it first of all isn't about money, it's not the money that counts and to get paid. Instead the important thing is that you are a part of creating good results and good experiences.(Lucas)

This sentence shows an interesting view – how we look at our work and what it is that motivates us. Are we just in it for the money or do we engage emotionally and get our satisfaction from the things we do and the meaning-making process that we belong to? From this view the optimal organisation also could be seen as a meaning-making phenomenon that hopefully contributes to people's life also outside work. This view has no clear boundaries between life and work. The experiences we have at work influence our life outside and also vice versa. If we find meaning and get good experiences at work our main motivational factor will not be the salary.

The optimal organisation is something that is created within collaboration and co-creation. But leaders are the ones who have a natural position to be able to clarify contexts, invite into meaningful dialogues and create contexts that make people feel good about themselves and proud of their contribution. Leaders have a unique possibility to influence the working place and the way people will be able to look upon themselves and to give their best.

Collaboration and joy

An organisation consists of the people in the organisation, their relationships and communication and how these relationships are led toward reaching the goal. The extent to which people find ways to collaborate influences the fulfilling of the task, how it is done, success and sustainability but it also influences how people look upon themselves in this context and if they enjoy the things they are doing.

Most of the participants highlighted collaboration as an important sign of the optimal organisation. Mary gives one example of this:

You notice it and you feel it when you meet your colleagues. There is openness and some kind of lightness. I think that it will be noticeable that people don't sit and work on their own, you can notice collaboration and laughter, and you can also notice a great piece of seriousness. I guess it is like you notice a flow and interaction, what a difficult question but an interesting one. .... When I notice that they reflect together about how they can support the families they meet. When they collaborate as a team, and bring new ideas, then it is great fun. (Mary)

Mary not only created a picture of how it looks; she also addresses the question that she is influenced by her colleagues' collaborative skills, 'it is great fun'. This also highlights how leaders are influenced by other members of the organisation and if the organisation works well the leader also gets more work satisfaction and enjoyment. Other participants also described the similar effect. Here is Eric:

It is possible to do something together, that everyone contributes to making it work. When this also is connected to the customer then it is great fun. Eric shows that he is directly

influenced by how he experiences engagement of his employees but also the importance of doing something together. (Eric)

When I listened to the stories of collaboration I experienced pride in the leaders' voices and I also experienced that they became very energetic in their descriptions. This is interesting and maybe we have found one important aspect for future leadership pride if we as leaders can contribute to a successful and appreciated collaborative context. Let's look at a couple of more signs. Here's Eric again:

People communicate in different ways that they have got support from each other, when it is many people who address this feeling it is a good sign. When I hear this kind of thing I know that the organisation is working well. (Eric)

In an optimal organisation I notice how people grow and how knowledge and thoughts are spread in the organisation. That the things we do together in the organisation make a difference; I also notice a curiosity in the group. (Antonia)

There is collaboration between people in the organisation, a co-creation. People are discussing with each other. (Gustav)

Aspects that also are highlighted are that people learn and grow when they communicate with each other. Knowledge becomes spread and shared.

They all connect collaboration to positive emotions, learning and growth. This also highlights the impact and importance of the social community at work. The social community could be seen as a human need and if people are naturally driven to belonging, this will be an important part of the organisation's culture and structure. If the organisation's social community aspects are very limited there might be a risk that people move more or less unconsciously to find other ways to belong with subcultures and allies that also might drive their motivation in other directions than the goal itself.

From this view the act of co-creation and collaboration also creates a social community which people could find meaning within.

The importance of collaboration could be a way of framing that we all are needed and that our different skills combined give the best result. Collaboration is not just a way of working effectively; it shows our wish to do this together, to put our positive energy into that we are a team. If we as leaders believe that everyone can contribute and that everyone is important and appreciated. A good collaboration consists of that we share and learn but also encourage each other. Everyone can contribute with different things, everyone is important but it is how we are able to create the whole together that matters in the end.

If people find good ways to collaborate and the social community gives meaning there also will be joy.

In an optimal organisation you can notice that people are happy, innovative and that there is joy. That it feels creative. I can move into this kind of organisation and feel the appreciative air; it needs to be a nice atmosphere and where everyone feels that he or she is allowed to express themselves. (Gustav)

People are laughing, they have fun and they dare to try new things. (Anna)

If people are relaxed, laugh, have fun and there is humour. (Bo)

We have a respectful attitude toward each other, even though we are very different as persons there is space for everyone. When it is optimal we are brave together, we also notice and respect each other. People grow and you can notice that people are proud of what they are doing. You can never guess how much it bubbles of activity in our organisation. (Antonia)

You are met by happy faces and I notice calmness in the group. (Mary)

Most of the participants explained their idea of an optimal organisation with pictures of how it would be noticed in the members of the organisations and in their positive emotions. They talked about culture, the air, and climate. They did not specifically highlight that it is noticed by that people appreciate each other but they talked about being brave together, collaboration and respectful cultures.

In this sense the appreciative culture they describe above from my view also will be shown in a culture of mutual respect where people value each other, feel comfortable, have trust in each other and can use their energy in the best way toward the goals.

Stories of possibilities

Introduction

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
(From the song Anthem by Leonard Cohen)

During this journey I have become more and more aware that possibilities and manoeuvring space as leaders very much are set in the way we think and understand. It will also be influenced by how we picture and imagine the "optimal", desired organisation. Are leaders reflecting on images of what could be possible and how they can contribute to this?

If we believe that there are possibilities, there will be possibilities. Believing is seeing. The starting point will be ourselves as humans.

The themes of possibilities I particularly caught:

- Identity and self-knowledge
- To be guided by values
- Communication and the language we use
- The importance of the mission
- Stories of leadership abilities
- Creating context, direction and clarity
- The power of co-creation

Identity and self-knowledge

Leadership is not that easy. We con ourselves into believing that the word is the same as the action. The ability to lead doesn't come from a snappy vocabulary, the books you have displayed on your shelves, your place on the organisational chart or that fashionable title on your business card. Leadership is always substantive and rarely fashionable. It is intensively personal and intrinsically scary, and it requires us to live the ideas we espouse in irrefutable ways every day of our lives (Farber, 2010).

Who am I?

How we understand who we are and how we have made sense of ourselves and the world around us influence the possibilities we see as leaders. From this view possibilities and actions start already in our mind and in the way we think. To make meaning is fundamental for us human beings. Our meaning making is a never ending process and our identity will never become fixed. Who we are and how we understand ourselves become an important aspect of self-knowledge; to know ourselves, recognise, at least in broad terms, our own personal histories of interactions in order to understand how come we act in particular ways in particular contexts.

Each one of us has a lot of experiences that have influenced who we are but we can always change and develop ourselves. From this view, self-knowledge and self-development becomes a very important aspect of leadership. This re-construction process toward who we would like to be can be triggered by different impulses. If we are open to inputs from our surroundings we will find infinite opportunities for us to develop our sense-making, to understand ourselves, others and our surroundings in new ways and also guidelines to how to act in the best way. As a leader our 'self' is our most valuable tool. To be able to act toward possibilities we need to get to know ourselves more and the leaders we would like to become.

Who do I want to become?

Leadership is not simply something we do. It comes from somewhere inside us. Leadership is a process, an intimate expression of who we are. It is our being in action. At its deepest level, leadership is authentic self-expression that creates values (Cashman, 2008).

To move into the field of who am I in this thesis feels like walking on very thin ice, I don't know when the ice will break and my conversation will get into too deep water. This is a field for psychologists and philosophers, a field I will only briefly touch here. But the sense I have made is that how I understand myself is inevitably interwoven with leadership. Our self-knowledge as a leader is probably the most influential factor on the possibilities I can see as a leader. How we look upon ourselves, our ability to develop and experience our and others' potential will highly influence how we also experience possibilities.

Bo highlights the importance of knowing yourself, to be safely connected to the ability to collaborate with and appreciate others. He also draws our attention to that our self-confidence influences what conversations we are able to have. Bo says 'if we are aware of ourselves, our emotional reactions and driving forces, less unconsciousness will drive us.'

During the interviews I didn't ask any direct questions about the importance of self-knowledge, but more or less all of them entered this domain through aspects they lifted forward. Lucas for example mentioned that it is important to be secure as a leader. I picked up the thread and asked follow-up questions as follows:

What difference do you think to be secure creates?

It makes the whole difference, if you are not secure you will be driven by irrational forces, you will be driven by emotions and fears that you are more or less conscious about. You have to be predictable as a leader. If you are irrational it will make it difficult to see continuity, you have to be predictable. If you are driven by irrational powers you will not be that. It would not be easy to follow or to relate to a leader like that.

What do you think has helped you to find yourself, your stability and calmness? And if you would give other leaders advice on what to do what would that be?

Spend time to get to know your 'self'. Expose yourself to situations, thoughts and situations that are outside your own box. Spend time in life to expose yourself to different things. When you do that it is then you also can experience and see new things about yourselves. Find the form (methods) that enables you to challenge and explore yourself. (Lucas)

Oscar mentioned the importance of also appreciating yourself as a leader and, if you don't do this, how it will influence your organisation.

I believe that it is very important to have an appreciative approach also toward ourselves as leaders. It is from my view easier to reflect and be critical to our own way of thinking and acting if we appreciate that we do as good as we can but also that when we realise that we can do things even better, also appreciate this awareness. How is it possible to genuinely appreciate others in the organisation if we don't appreciate ourselves? How is it possible to feel comfortable and to do something good if we don't experience our self as good and important? (Oscar)

Oscar highlights what I think is very important for future leadership pride. I find that how leaders' own abilities to appreciate themselves can be supported to grow is an important question. With this view I also mean leaders' ability to appreciate their learning potential.

When I asked Oscar how it would be noticed that he would be more appreciative toward himself, he said:

Yes who will notice this? If I succeed with this I will be satisfied. Then I will have less self-criticism and my employees will feel more secure in what expectations they have of me. (Oscar)

The aspects that Oscar highlights pay important attention to the idea that the confidence we have as leaders will influence the organisation but also the importance of personal development. From my understanding Oscar talks about the importance of believing in himself. Who would like to follow a leader who does not believe in her or himself? But on the other hand a leader who naturally struggles with his or her self-confidence might be a much more reflective and humble person than the leader who thinks he or she already has the answers and does not need to change.

Tolmach Lakoff describes in de Fina *et al* (2006) that once, not all that long ago, human identity was generally viewed rather simply. It was assumed that identity achieved its final form in the course of childhood and adolescence. In recent years students of identity have radically changed their views. Increasingly they see human identity as a continual work in progress, constructed and altered by the totality of life experiences. While much of the work in supporting this belief concentrates on larger aspects of identity, especially gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference – de Fina *et al* (2006) highlight the fact that human identity involves many other categories. They write that identity is constructed in complex ways, more or less consciously and over time. From this view no leaders have reached a final form.

Fluker (2009) uses a narrative view in describing our 'self' and refers to a narrative script that defines the individual, the stories that name the individual's experience. He says that character is the personal dimension of leadership.

What then determines our character? The morally anchored self would from Fluker's ideas be our ability to examine our life experiences in relation to larger historical and cultural narratives. Fluker is talking about reclaiming the ethical centre which in his view requires that the unfinished business of one's life story (the pains, the hurts, and the unresolved contradictions) will be addressed. Fluker says further that one should not, or better, cannot begin the work of creating a just and healthy civil society until one has explored the deepest regions of self-knowledge and the motivational content of agency that mark the core of individuality , personal morality and practices.

I understand Fluker's words as the importance of developing the ability to lead oneself, and to lead your own emotions as a leader. If we have a lot of unsolved pain or experiences that are triggered when we interact with others, this will influence our ability to lead.

Fluker also highlights the importance of the morally anchored self and pays from this view attention to the importance of exploring our own moral and core values that we would like to guide us in our leadership. He talks about reclaiming the ethical centre which suggests that we all have an ethical centre inside ourselves to re-claim. Finally he also mentions the motivational content of agency which in my view pays attention to the importance of

connecting morality, values and motivation as an important part of unique and personal leadership.

The cognitive task for the leader is from Fluker's view to engage the self critically by probing, examining and asking hard questions of identity, purposes, dreams and aspirations – connected to a reflexive approach. The way we understand our role is from Fluker's view related to how we been shaped by early childhood experiences, family, significant others, traditions, institutions and the society of which we are apart.

Lee (2003) draws a similar conclusion and writes that human beings are in many ways a product of their experiences. Whatever natural characteristics we are born with, we are powerfully shaped by our upbringing and other life experiences. In response to those experiences we develop distinctive patterns of being, feeling, thinking, relating and behaving. By identifying those patterns, and making them conscious, managers can make a choice and be able to connect the personal journey to the practical journey.

Also Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) have similar thoughts and write that an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, which are constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with shifting answers, depending upon the position made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories from which we make sense of our own and others' lives.

I really like the image of who we are as leaders as an open question with a shifting answer depending on the position being available. But this position being available is from my view highly dependent on how well we know ourselves and what possibilities we can see but also from what position we take.

All the authors mentioned above address our 'self' as something that has developed and emerged in relational processes. The thoughts also connect leadership and self to core values that could guide us as leaders to make ethical judgements and decisions. The words they use, for example of being in action, self-expression and reclaiming our ethical centre,

also highlight an active choice. We have an active choice how we would like to involve ourselves in the activity of on-going self-knowledge and development.

It is no use denying that we have genes that give us prerequisites for life. It is also possible that we inherit some prerequisites that enable us to be more skilful in certain areas or to have more to struggle with in other areas. But I strongly believe that there is no ready written script of how our life will be and how we will develop our abilities. We are not fixed as individuals. I guess that most people have experienced or heard about people who have done remarkable things that no one thought were possible. But the remarkable from my view often appears in the small steps we take to challenge ourselves and our views, when we get to experience and see new things. Hopefully we also have experienced that we have managed things we didn't believe we could do. If we have not tried we cannot know.

To understand ourselves is also to understand ourselves in relation to others and a journey to understand others better. Which sides of me will be most dominant in different interactions and meetings with others will be dependent on the prerequisites I have and how people approach me but most influential will be how well I know myself and others and can manage myself in the best way. To understand myself then, as a leader of a particular organisation, is also to understand how I am interconnected with others in this organisation and also how I experience that the world outside influences my possibilities to be able in the moment to give my best.

When we enter the subject of self-knowledge it opens up myriads of interesting ways to deepen this conversation but this is another story. On the other hand, some earlier authors view these similar questions as we today find as being revolutionary and hopeful, which I find particularly interesting.

Adler (1927) for example was devoted to develop a science of individual psychology. Some of the ideas central for him were:

Each person strives for superiority or personal competence.

Each person develops a style of life that is particularly deliberate and partly unconscious.

Adler said that the most important quality of a healthy personality is an acquired capacity of 'fellow feeling' and accompanied concern to foster the wellbeing of others. Adler also says that the ego is the part of the psyche that is creative. It creates new realities through the process of setting goals and bringing them into fruition.

Sollod *et al* (2009) write that Adler's view of people as basically good and capable of genuine altruistic social concern was opposite to Freud's growing pessimism and fatalism about human nature.

Adler expressed a healthy optimism that speaks to me and makes me curious of how we can use these thoughts also in leadership development. The idea of setting up goals for our development could support the evolving process of leadership and enable us to see the fruitful outcome of our own development. The idea of altruism also becomes important and I like Adler's idea of 'fellow feeling' and this also invites us into fellowship, to acknowledge each other. Adler's views show how important our social interactions and how we look upon others are to our own wellbeing and development; if we develop our own 'fellow feeling' as leaders and can encourage an appreciative climate in our working place, this will also influence our own wellbeing as leaders.

One important part in developing our self-confidence in our leadership is to grow self confidence in relation to others and to be able to be comfortable when we meet and interact with different kinds of people and in different situations. I believe that if we are genuinely concerned about others and their views this will also make us feel good about ourselves and increase our confidence. But we also need to find space to be concerned about our self, our own development, a space to be mindful about ourselves and appreciate our own learning journey. The more we know ourselves and how we interact and the person we would like to be will limit the risk to be driven by irrational powers, emotions and fears.

Conscious leadership

To know myself is a world to explore but it is not a world that is, it is a world that could be. To know myself is an exploration of who I would like to become. It is an exploration of potential resources and abilities I have and can use on my journey to become the one I would like to become (Kicki Oljemark, 2012).

When I listened to the interviews I became impressed of how all of them to a high or less high degree mentioned aspects that show that they had become aware of different things but also seek for a more conscious leadership. You will find examples earlier in the text and below other themes. Eric talked in his story about how the interview made him aware. Lucas told us about how he constantly invites reflections to enable himself to learn more and become more conscious. Bo also talks about that he is looking for responses so that he can develop his leadership and so on.

"Once I wrote an ironic email to my employees about that it is good to leave for vacation without asking. One of my employees expressed that he felt accused. The thing I learned was that I need to be very careful with what and how I communicate even when I send short messages through mail".

"It will show in the conversations we have if I am appreciated or not. Depending on the responses I will be able to get an experience of how the things I think and feel will be experienced by other. I believe that it is important to have a basic security to be able to collaborate with others in a good way, that I have stability so that I can appreciate my employees and their views and reactions, views and reactions that also will support my own development. This will have an enormous importance for what kind of conversations we will be able to have." Bo

Antonia gives one example of the importance to reflect to increase her consciousness

"It is like the question you asked, what is it that has formed me? I would like to think more about this question. I have tried to develop myself through life and during this process I also have learned by looking at things I have experienced that other people could benefit from developing. I have tried to develop a conscious approach and as leaders we always need to start with ourselves. I think about how I do things and about how people react on my

actions, I also how I physically move myself in relationship to other people. I think a lot about different words and what they mean to me and could mean. I also think about what gets me going and what upsets me. I think about what I can do until next time so that I do not end up in the similar situation once more. Awareness of what I do and how come I did like I did, this is the essence of all. This makes a huge difference." Antonia

A conscious leadership could also be described as being aware of the realities and nature of your organisation and how it interacts with its surroundings. What is it that constitutes its conditions? What challenges and issues do I as a leader have to handle to support the organisation and its members to work optimally?

"What is our mission? In our organisation we need to think about our mission and the people whom we shall serve. How can we approach these people without offending them" Bo

"I think a lot about who we can communicate the service we offer to the world outside and also about how we can interact and collaborate with other actors. The people we represent are in an exposed life situation and can have difficulties to speak for themselves. I need to invite conversations in my organisation about how we represent the people we meet in the best way and we also need to take responsibility for how society and media communicates our particular and our clients questions" Antonia

"To learn I need to meet and interact with people in my organisation and the costumers we have. I have noticed connections between if my sell staffs have too much focus on selling things related to how many things we sell. If one person's individual sell figures fall I often also can see that this person has become too intensive in his or her approach to sell products and tries to convince costumers to buy. I also have noticed how employees grow depending on how I talk to and approach them. I need to talk to them and interact with them to learn and develop my leadership. It is exciting to see how they grow.

I have learned that each person involved in the business is very important for the experience of our business. The person who delivers a product to the door gives a decisive impression as well as the person who sits in the counter and receives the payment; everyone will be ambassadors and influence how the costumer experiences us. To be able to learn I need to

be involved with the business, employees and the costumers we meet in our business. "Mattias"

To be able to lead others in a way that enables them to give their best we also need to be able to lead ourselves. We need to develop our consciousness about our own thoughts, feelings and actions. We need to find ways to use ourselves in the best way in relation to the people we have the mission to lead but also in relation to other people related to the organisation. This can never include only one way of thinking, feeling or acting. It includes conscious choices of what could be the best to do in relation to different aspects and ethical considerations. We need to find a comfortable way to be 'ourselves' and to get access to the multifaceted colour palette of skills, abilities and possible actions we are able to contribute with. A conscious leadership from this view includes striving toward a growth of this access.

A conscious leadership could be said to be constantly striving toward developed awareness of how I can develop my interactions and relationships in a constructive way and how I can develop myself in a way that makes me feel good about myself and proud of what I am doing.

A conscious leadership could be seen as a selfless choice in relation to responsibility for others and the organisation, but we also need to allow ourselves to be selfish in the way that if we get to know ourselves better this will both give us and others a better life. If we enjoy what we are doing, if we can see possibilities and appreciate people around us we will also be able to be happier and become more proud of what we are doing.

Consciousness from my view doesn't include finding 'true' answers to how we feel and act in certain ways, but we can get a few clues and hypotheses that can widen our understanding and give us a more conscious manoeuvring space. A conscious leadership invites the possibility to make wise decisions, to know what I am doing, being able to have the end in view. How will the actions I take influence others and the organisation?

Gergen (2009) views the challenge philosophy and experimental psychologists have had to give answers to how consciousness is constituted. He says that we often view consciousness as a mirror of the external world, and adds that if consciousness were to

function as a mirror how could it mirror its own conditions? The author proposes a picture of the mind as a relational performance but he also says that this picture is questionable and challenging. From Gergen's view, reasoning could be seen as relationship. From this view our reasoning could be seen as being in relationship to something. There must be a background to see anything at all. I think that relational aspects of how we develop our consciousness and reasoning are very interesting and important. But even if our understandings grow and even though I think that we have unlimited space to grow through relationships and learning from interactions the sense we make out of it from my view always will be individual.

It is easy to become linear and to get the idea that others do things with us, things that makes us react in certain ways. If we incorporate the idea that we cannot know from what position people feel, think and act and that we never can know how conscious they are about what has led them to these actions we also invite the idea that we are the ones as leaders who can make a conscious difference.

To become aware of how much we as leaders influence and also are influenced by our surroundings can be painful. There is a conscious choice to be made if this 'pain' and increased awareness that is my own to carry is something I experience as good, like the pain when a woman gives birth to a child, or if we will more or less consciously avoid this pain.

Being a conscious leader also involves, from my view, being aware of our own desires and interests and at the same time not being too much in love with one's own thoughts so that I as a leader can be curious about others' desires and beliefs. We could say that conscious leadership creates awareness of how you can position yourself in different situations. I think that all of us have a repertoire of different styles; we also have different abilities and resources that we can use in our leadership in different ways. Depending on what individual or group we are meeting, different sides of us and approaches could be more or less appropriate. Some individuals and groups need more clarity and some a lot of encouragement, some need coaching and others need to be listened to. All people have different resources and needs and this also changes over time and in different contexts. We are also co-created in organisations and influence each other.

Pearce (2007) addresses the ability adults have to continue to evolve and lifts forward important parts of the evolving process: the ability to see around the corners of one's own beliefs, to hold contradictory thoughts in awareness simultaneously without stress, to differentiate between understanding another point of view and agreeing with it and to acknowledge that there is something more beyond the limits of one's own ability to perceive and know. We don't just add more and more to think about, but we experience a shift in how we think about them. Selves could be seen as emergent entities that have the capacity for continued transformation.

In many ways the idea of conscious leadership reminds me of a reflexive and reflecting position. If we as leaders pay attention to our own insights from the responses we get, we can also start to adjust our own actions. This will furthermore limit our risk to act and judge on our assumptions or irrational feelings.

Self-reflection gives us the opportunity to look deep into ourselves and find skills, development areas and the freedom to think and act in an ethical way, guided by our values. A conscious leadership from this view invites us to continuously reconnect to values and to have a wish to increase our awareness of our driving forces and to adapt ourselves in a way that others could benefit the most from.

By inviting reflection as a natural part of our leadership it can help us to understand the links between what we do in our practice and how others react. It will also give us clues of how we can improve our own effectiveness in the way we develop our practice. To reflect more consciously on our practices can help us to understand the links between what we experience, our feeling, thinking and doing.

Reflections on how we think, act, influence and interact will invite us into endless possibilities of personal and professional development. If we view our fears and shortcomings as learning opportunities and as invitations for us to develop ourselves, the journey of leadership will add value to our lives at the same time as we develop our leadership.

Our own quest for developed consciousness will create a platform that increases our understanding about possible action and how we as leaders and the humans we are can influence our organisations to work optimally.

To be guided by values

The core of who we are and want to be in many aspects touches our values. Most of the participants talked about values when they shared their stories which inspired my interest to explore the field of how we can be guided by our values.

Secretan (2006) writes that leadership is not a formula or a programme; it is a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the heart of others. These thoughts connect to Adler's ideas and also to what I have found in the interviews. Values lead our behaviour to a smaller or larger extent. Anna put words on what makes a good leader.

I believe that the foundation is about seeing, respecting and understanding people. I can be a great expert but if I don't manage to handle the 'little person' I won't be a good leader.

If we take a look at the values that the leaders have expressed in the study it is easy to see that it is not possible for them to leave their personal values behind, it would be like cutting off the root system of the foundation of who they are and want to be. If we move into an organisation and forget to explore and reconnect to our own value systems it could from my view be easy to get lost. On the other hand a well thought through personal values system can create a platform and stable foundation for our leadership. This is also a way to become and develop our identity. Who am I and who do I want to be?

As leaders, we might have had more or less time to think about what the personal values are that we would like to guide us in our leadership. We also could be more or less comfortable in how we experience that we can live our values in the organisation where we work. This thesis shows that many leadership possibilities reside in the way we experience that we can live our values. Our manoeuvring space resides to a high degree in how we can live our values. The values we have also can create possibilities to guide our actions.

But the idea of being guided by values is also tricky and I think that it is easy to also get lost in our own nice words and forget how we want our values to be experienced by others.

In the conversation with Antonia, she came back to the idea of being humble and to not experience oneself as better than someone else.

I believe that it is important to value people and respect everyone, to show respect and to not in any way think that you are better than someone else is an important value base for me.

I asked Antonia how she thought her values were noticed:

I have been trusted to be their manager and to lead them, and it is very important that I don't use this position of power in a way that influences them negatively. I think a lot of that I have a power position in relation to them. This means that I need to be extra curious about them. It is important that I listen to them and how they also express themselves.

In the sentences above Antonia shows an example of how she let her values guide her in her leadership. In relation to the idea of not being better than someone else, she has also developed her approach to become more of a listener and focus on developing her curiosity.

Gustav refers his values to political issues and says:

I have left wing sympathies and socialist grounded thoughts and values. Words like equal value and solidarity are important for me.

When I asked him how he connected solidarity to leadership he gets said:

It has to be something about that people has the right to be listened to. Even if all of us aren't so talented and are talented at different things we are a team and we are equally valuable.

Gustav highlights similar values as Antonia; equality and listening are important but also the aspect of the right to be listened to. Gustav moves on:

Yes, honest meetings are important for me, when I want to meet people and to discuss things, that people have equal worth; no human being is never ever worth more than another human being even if you are a president.

I asked Gustav what difference he thought this thinking made and he said:

It is very important that nobody will be left outside or behind and that everyone feels that they are involved and are listened to.

Gustav`s words have strong connection to his earlier statement that solidarity is important for him.

John also connects his ideas and values and shared some actions that he can do to show trust and his wish to let people grow through taking responsibility.

Ok, what is it that enables people to feel trust and grow? It is to be able to be a part, to be able to take responsibility and to be a part of solving things. This means that I should interact as little as possible in the things they do and I let them take their own responsibility. They have said that they think that it is nice, to be able to do things own their own. I believe that this is what makes people feel that they are needed and important.

When I asked Eric about how his leadership is noticed he said.

My leadership would be noticed by the fact that I am very present which also means that I need to do some productive work at evenings. I am consensus driven for good or for worse while my colleague is driven by making decisions for good or for worse. I walk around and talk to people. I look for the things that are good in the organisation, to copy that. I want to be the glue in the construction and if something works well I want to boost that. The disadvantage is that it might be a little too much consensus. I want to find things that are good in the organisation. I talk a lot with people.

It is interesting to notice how coherent Eric's story is in the way he follows his values and expresses similar values that he described earlier that his father had; to see everyone, no one is worth more than another etc. But he also highlights that even if he lives his values,

the way he does it can be a little bit too much, like he mentions the idea of consensus and that he needs to work in evenings. From this view, living our values becomes a transformational process, to adopt and adjust them in the most effective way for the organisation and also in a way that creates meaning and supports our employees. We need to be aware of them and how we can be guided by them in relation to what we would like to achieve and we might find out different things we would like to achieve that requires different actions or combined actions. The aim and how we can be guided become closely connected.

When I met Eric the second time he said:

I was frustrated when we met last time but I got the insight when I listened to the interview afterwards how come I was frustrated and disappointed. Many people react by becoming angry; I become more disappointed and I can see from my childhood how I have been. I acknowledge others' expertise but minimise my own. I trust people so much that when they consciously provoke and move outside the frames I become disappointed. After the interview I understood how come I had become so incredibly disappointed, I overreact to human weaknesses. I connect it to honesty and morality. When people abuse morality, for example when we collaborate, it becomes a big issue for me, bigger than for the other person.

I asked Eric how he would like to support himself for the future in this matter and he said:

I would like to reflect further on this because I often work through others. How would I work? There have been situations when I have not succeeded with my approach and then I get a little confused about how I can do it. I think that I need to develop my ability to quickly change between consensus and clarity. Sometimes when it is a little bit chaotic my way of working doesn't work and I need to be better at becoming clearer.

In what ways would this benefit the employees and the organisation?

We will be able to move forward more quickly.

I think it is very interesting to follow Eric's reflections and to see how he finds his own answers. Arising from values that guided him he touches down on frustration and then reflects on how he can understand and develop his approach in a meaningful way for others. The thing that is the right thing for him might not be the same for others. He moves from being led maybe more unconsciously by values toward being guided by values that also include interactions with others, which in this sense means that he needs to adapt how he would live his values according to different contexts and people.

One tricky thing is if we don't experience the values we would like to be lived in our organisation are shown by others. If we then get angry and lead by our emotions it is easy to get irrational and to forget to live our own values. To be a leader is very much to be responsible for our own values but also to respect others' values and also how similar values as mine can be expressed in different ways. If we would like to achieve a change we need to rely on values that we think are important for people to be able to change. If we are guided by these values when we transform our emotions into actions, it will be easier for people to keep their dignity and to change. From the view above we also can connect to Lucas' ideas of being a role model.

You need to be a role model to the people you lead. You need to be a role model in what you say and to be trustworthy. I think that you signal trust in many ways more than just from the spoken word, body language and signals. If you are not a good role model you will lose your leadership. You have to earn your leadership each moment. I don't know if it is my upbringing or the genes but I have with me a genuine respect for other people. I believe that all of us have pre-assumptions, preconceptions about each other; it is stupid to say that we don't have, but it is not them who are going to lead us. I have always thought that it is exciting to listen to other people. I have trained myself to do it but I have also always been a good listener in the individual conversation but also to be present. I remember what people have told me and this is an important part of the leadership. That people feel that they are genuinely listened to, heard and seen. You might have made another decision but you have at least listened. (Lucas)

Lucas highlights that leaders are role models. He also points out that we all have pre-assumptions about others but with more awareness we will limit the risk of being led by

them. The awareness that we have values that we have strong emotional connections to also can support us to act more consciously and avoid being driven by our emotions.

John describes how his values could be noticed:

I think that it is very important to listen and to be a part. It is important to show that you care, to say hi and to walk around in the afternoon and say goodbye. Another piece of advice is to join the coffee break and to be together with the employees during lunchtime, to stay at meetings, stop and listen to what people think. (John)

From the discussions with Oscar earlier about his leadership and the frustration he expressed, a shift in his story occurred when I asked him about his humanity. What does it look like?

My humanity is dominated by an extreme amount of hope. There are always possibilities for something good. There are also always more resources than you can see. If there is something strange or if things are not working, the context probably has had a lot of influences on this and then you have to look at these patterns and how things are-connected. Sometimes I end up with my head in the wall and then I hope that someone else will be there for me. (Oscar)

I experienced that when Oscar focused on his customers and how he wanted his values to live in relation to them his energy level increased. His direction also became very clear and he is very hopeful. When I read this sentence I reconnect with the frustration that he expressed when he described his own leadership, lack of clarity and from my view confusion. I wish that he would use his own wise thoughts also to guide him in his leadership.

Many organisations have values that are more or less set in their culture or ethical codes that frame the activities in the working place. As a leader we need to be able to connect to these values in a way that makes us feel comfortable. From my view one important part of finding ourselves in our leadership is how we enable these value systems to get along and become a natural part of who we are and would like to be as leaders. By connecting, we can find ways to be guided by our and the organisation's values.

The outcome of how we are guided by our actions depends on how we transform them to be most useful for us and for others.

I will let Bo end this part with his words:

How I look upon the relationship between my values as human being and my leadership? I believe that they are connected. I think/ believe that leadership starts somewhere in the meeting between people, when people meet and connect. (Bo)

Communication and the language we use

The act of communication

The ways we live our values is one way of communicating what we value and believe in. The way we communicate and the words we use become our most powerful tool in our leadership. None of the leaders highlighted the importance of communication specifically but from my view most of the things they talked about were related to communication. This is from the view that I perceive communication as everything in our relational living together. Communication could be seen as a very complex matter. What we experience, how things we experience communicate to us as individual in different ways. (Cronen, 1995; Bushe, 2010) Complexity in communication could also be seen as arising from the view that I believe that we become in the language we use and that we are relational beings (Shotter, 1993a, 2008; Gergen, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2009).

Kevin Barge and Christine Oliver (2003) write that how we use language to make sense of people, events and situations moves us to notice particular features of our surroundings as well as ignoring others and guides how we respond within that setting. Who a person becomes at a particular moment in time, what an action means and how a situation is understood depends on how people use language.

Bateson (1972) describes the evolution of communication and that a very important stage in this evolution occurs when the organism gradually ceases to respond quite 'automatically' to the mood-signs of another and becomes able to recognise the sign as a

signal; that is, to recognise that the other individuals and their own signals are only signals, that can be trusted, distrusted, falsified, denied, amplified, corrected and so forth. He writes further that the phenomenon of 'play' could only occur if the participants were capable of some degree of meta-communication, *i.e.,* of exchanging signals which would carry the message 'this is play'.

Campbell (2003) refers to a view of language, presented by Kenneth Gergen (1994), as a central platform of social constructionism. This is that the function of language is not to represent reality but to enable us to engage in social relations, and the meanings that we construe about the world result from these social interactions. Campbell writes further that the social constructionist view of language is a pragmatic one. Some words or ideas are more successful in helping us to cope with life. Campbell writes that language is judged on the basis of its usefulness in helping people to coordinate their thoughts and actions within various communities. I would like to add that how we individually understand words will influence their usefulness and be more or less helpful for us when we try to coordinate our thoughts, actions and to create meaning together.

The power of the language we use and our ability to communicate as leaders could from the views above include infinite possibilities. Our language enables us to engage in different relationships and we are inviting others into different understanding and conversations depending on what words we use, how we communicate and how others understand the words we use and the way we communicate. We all have our unique experiences and understanding in relation to different words. By the choice we make different meanings will occur and a problem-based language might not be the most helpful language to reach for to strengthen resources and potential.

The power of the stories we tell about ourselves

The language we use becomes stories we tell about our organisation, about others and about ourselves. To challenge ourselves is a daily part of our lives. We can never know fully the outcome of the things we do, that is life. This is also life of organisations.

Each organisation develops its own culture based on its unique relations. But each organisation also develops from the stories that are told and meanings are created from

these stories. In some ways the manager also could be seen as a story collector, what stories do we listen to, encourage and collect? We also build our organisational identity through these stories.

When I asked Anna how she understood the phenomenon of stories she said:

I believe that stories are very important. I think that people have a very positive image of our organisation because of the positive image I have of my employees and that I share. I have got feedback from the union representatives that they have never heard anyone talk as positively about their employees as I do. I also think that it is important that we know the heritage we have. What do we bring with us that we can benefit from? I think it is important to believe in ourselves also from the heritage we have got. We played with the idea of our organisation as a love story. How do we want to talk about our organisation when we meet our customers? I believe that it is very important to take care of good and life-giving stories and history when we build new things. We should not forget that the people we meet have done a marvellous job also before we came. (Anna)

Anna highlights how we create meaning together from the stories we tell about ourselves to ourselves and to others. She also highlights the power of positive stories when we become together.

Leaders have the position to be able to involve people toward the desirable future. To imagine the future together is powerful. Stories are one way to influence and impact the way people feel and act. Stories are also a way to make people think in pictures instead of just words.

If told well, stories allow us to enter a different space. They have a tendency to transform us, to take us to another place, a different place. Images can help us to enable us to represent our feelings visually. By giving expression to feelings that may otherwise be repressed, visualisation and storytelling can contribute greatly to our emotional wellbeing. With stories we can turn things over in our minds and in this way it is also possible to imagine specific activities.

It is an old belief that images can have a direct physiological effect. We begin to salivate when we imagine eating something delicious. A visualisation can produce change in blood flow, blood sugar levels, gastro intestinal activity, heart rate, blood pressure, muscular tension, breathing and so on. So through positive images and with the words and stories we tell we can physically influence people's wellbeing.

Einstein (year unknown) said that it is not possible to solve the problems with the same thinking we had when we created them. From this view it is hard to develop new styles of organisations and management while continuing to think in old ways. What Gareth Morgan (1993) in his turn calls imaginization is an invitation to re-image ourselves and what we can do.

Visualisation has been used to stimulate creative thinking and to train decision making and problem solving skills. Visualisation could be described as the heart of creative management. It can be used to train people in the art of managing change and in developing new ways of thinking about organisations and management and it makes it possible for us to tell stories about what could be. Inventing images or stories that can resonate with the challenges we have and help motivate and mobilise people to achieve desired goals or to cope with the unknown is becoming an important skill for leaders.

In order to build stories for the future it is also important to look for what is already there. Every story has its influence from earlier experiences. Like the idea of Appreciative Inquiry, it is possible to look at storytelling as looking for stories that people are proud of, stories about when it worked well, stories that give energy and then bring these stories into the future together with stories of what it could look like.

It is possible to say that organisations are built on multiple stories, some told and shared and others live in the minds of the members. Different stories define how we experience our self as individuals and group but also who I become in this group.

I believe that our future is unwritten. A story has the power to envision a world that could be and it can be very powerful and engaging. This also includes building stories about ourselves and who we would like to become.

Antonia highlights that how people talk about their business influences them:

I think it is important for people to have pride in what they do. Everyone is happy to talk about our business and people think it's fun. We have so much positive to say and people becomes proud when they talk about this. When we are proud it also is easier to withstand critical issues, receive them and try to answer them in a better way. (Antonia)

Antonia's words make me think that it can be easier for us to be self-reflective and challenge our own views and to learn if we feel good about ourselves. With pride and self-confidence also comes an ability to criticise ourselves to make ourselves even better. When we find and share life giving stories and stories about pride we also invest in our own and our organisation's ability to develop.

As managers we have a fantastic opportunity to influence what kind of stories will be told in our organisation. We have the position that makes it possible for us to create context for the growth of a solid identity, not just for each person in the organisation but also the identity of the organisation. The words we use and the stories we tell matter.

Organisations are built on stories. The way a leader can encourage, invite and communicate stories that support clarity, trust, collaboration, pride and all the things we experience is important to enable the optimal organisation to make a difference. Stories will get real life when we invite people to tell them themselves and to share them with others.

The importance of the mission

Without any mission there wouldn't be any position for a manager and there would not be anything to lead. To enable organisations to work optimally everyone needs to share a vision and goals. When we talk about possibilities, these in high degree will be influenced by our mission, how we understand it, are able lead it and involve others. The mission could be viewed differently; one perspective is to lead the task of the organisation and to have a vision of what we would like to achieve. When we think about how this task and vision most successfully will be fulfilled we need to consider our mission to lead, involve and support the members of the organisation to achieve the task in a successful way. Gustav shares a metaphor.

Gustav highlights in his metaphor of the ship on the sea the mission as travelling toward a direction. The mission includes purpose, aim and also space for how to do this, sometimes we need to stop or take another path. To start with to be able to do a good job as a leader we need to know the mission we have and secure that it is clear. This will give us legitimacy to lead and support our manoeuvring space and creativity. Second, the employees need to know the mission and what their tasks are to be able to contribute in a meaningful way. Lucas says;

My mission is to drive the company forward and to ensure that we do our best. My mission is to ensure that it goes well, feels good and that we are growing.

Lucas's description highlights the essence and importance of how to do it. The sentence also includes the relational part of the mission and that it is something we do together – 'we do our best and we are growing'. All the leaders highlight in different ways that leading an organisation is nothing you can do by yourself and that collaboration is one main factor of the mission and to achieve the goals.

Another theme that is noticeable in their stories is to carry out the mission in a good way: 'That it goes well and feels good', 'in a good way'.

All of the participants described the mission as something that they have the responsibility to lead and that they need to show the direction, that this is a very important part of leadership. But I experienced them as more or less comfortable in showing the direction. My reflection about this is that to be able to show the direction you need to know the direction but also to be comfortable to point out the direction with confidence so that others can follow safely. You need to be comfortable with the mission but also with your own possibilities and abilities to work with others toward this.

To be clear about the mission you need to know the mission and in two cases the managers expressed confusion about what their mission was. Here's Oscar:

We should really need to carve out more clearly what it is that I should do in my mission, to find that core clearer, the mission is very wide. ... I would like to have more clarity, that my mission was more clearly described, expectations on me and clarity in connection to goals

and about the prerequisites that are given me/us to fulfil the mission. If this is unclear it of course influences the possibilities to perform and implement. Clarity would give a possibility to experience when I have achieved what is expected by me. It would contribute to more satisfaction in my work when I have reached a goal so that it not just ends up in a quest for more and more. Sometimes I can experience that it is easy to feel insufficient, a feeling of insufficiency, it could also be a personal thing but there is a feeling of insufficiency that I carry with me all the time and it is frustrating. (Oscar)

Oscar highlights how his experienced lack of clarity influences him in a negative way. He mentions that it could be a personal thing but he strongly connects the feeling of insufficiency to the working context and his mission. Oscar also highlights the part of satisfaction and to be able to achieve the goals that are expected from above. This also opens up the question for whom and what purpose we are doing what we are doing. To what extent do we need appreciation and to what extent are we leading toward the direction from which we get appreciation? If we experience that we are not able to achieve what we think is expected of us, how does this influence our confidence as leaders? How occupied are we about trying to find out how to act in relation to our own leaders or the board and how much energy are we able to put into the act of interaction and to lead the people we should lead? What about if there is a gap between what we understand, focus on, put our energy into and things that really could motivate us, give meaning and that give us energy to fulfil our mission?

It is not easy to know if it is only the lack of clarity from the top that affects Oscar or his own ideas about lack of clarity that makes him feel like he does.

Oscar continues…

I would need more space, I am thinking about time to create space for reflection, making plans, long term planning and avoid being reactive all the time. I used to think that I am looking forward to catching up. In any way it is about a kind of approach that creates a context where I always need to catch up, when you stop to take a breath you become delayed again. Actually one needs to chisel out more clearly what it is that I should do in my mission, to find the core more clearly. (Oscar)

Oscar's story reminds me of a fictional story I once heard. It is about a man who was orienteering in the woods and got lost. He didn't know where he was or where he was heading. Then suddenly a hot air balloon lands beside him and he is invited to a ride up in the air so that he can see the surroundings. When he has the perspectives from above and could have a meta perspective he could both see where he stood and where he was heading and he could also see different ways to reach the goals, but when he was lost he couldn't see anything.

My curiosity led me to ask Oscar the following question about what could influence so that he would feel satisfied with his mission a couple of years ahead.

Then it would be the feeling I will have. There will be pride, as the dominant feeling. I can come to work with my head held high because I am leading such a great activity. The things we do are good and we get positive responses from the top management.

In what way will this make a difference?

It is the harsh reality; we will show a good economical result.

I experienced that when Oscar got the possibility to imagine a positive picture of the mission in the future he expressed more positive feelings and pride but once more he ended up with that a good economy is the main thing that would make him feel this way and he made a clear connection to that his hope is to get a response from top management that he is doing something good connected to economy.

His thoughts highlight the importance of positive feedback on what we are doing, to get responses and feedback to be able to be proud of what we are doing. But also that the feedback directs us toward the direction we get feedback. To be proud is from my viewpoint important in order to be able to accomplish the mission. This opens up a question about whether it is possible that we might seek to get recognition even if it ends up with us working toward something that is not completely coherent with our own values.

From the thoughts above the aspects of how a mission comes from above and will be forwarded down in the organisation becomes crucial – that each level and person needs to,

by him or herself, make the mission their own, to be able trust the process and be able to show a comfortable clarity and direction to others. We could say that to have a clear mission and to know what you would like to do with this mission is an important responsibility for you as a leader. From Oscar's thoughts we can also learn that to be able to lead the mission in a good way we need time to create space for reflection, making plans, long term planning and avoid being reactive all the time.

Another reflection I had was that the room for manoeuvring space a leader actually has and that he / she experiences that he / she has are not the same thing. What we experience might be the thing that limits us the most.

Like I have mentioned earlier, I experienced that most of the leaders mention the importance of making one's own choice to lead the mission in different ways but also the importance to have an idea of what you would like to achieve with the mission.

It is easy to think that the mission is fixed but I believe that there is always a space in all missions that can enable leaders to give it their personal and unique touch.

I have developed a belief that if leaders and the other members in the organisation know the direction and feel emotionally related to the vision and its goals, this will enable people to give their best. I also believe that when people are able to give their best this will also influence the economy in a positive way. To have a good economy as the main goal itself could from my view be a contradiction to a good economy, creative development and sustainability. I believe that if we only have the economy in the front we can lose sight of the genuine and potential engagement for the cause that our employees have and could have. It will make a difference if we as leaders invite employees into collaboration in a meaningful way. I believe that good economy will be influenced by if people are engaged and able to give their best related to the mission. I also believe that this is closely connected to an organisation and leadership which focuses on goals that engage people in a way that they can imagine the importance of their contribution. This also include conversations and tasks that makes people experience their importance and makes them feel that their contribution will be connected to meaningful values.

Stories of leadership abilities

When I listened to the leaders and also when I view my own experience I find that it is not possible to make a difference between who I am, my identity and my personal abilities when we live our leadership. To fair extent, our personal abilities will influence to what degree people in the organisation will trust us and want to collaborate with us to reach the goals. All leaders have abilities and skills but also potentials that we cannot imagine until we start to explore them. Helpful leadership abilities become important.

Courage

Courage is a word that is widespread and it is easy to draw connections to doing brave things. What is brave is from my view in the eyes of the beholder and it is not possible to measure personal courage by others. Still courage might be one of our most helpful companions when we work as leaders but maybe in new ways than the first sight gives us. Let's see how the leaders describe aspects of courage;

It is important that people feel that I am engaged, committed and that they don't feel that I am afraid. I think that it is important to dare to expose yourself and the group for new things, to dare to walk on the ice. (Antonia)

It is like I have talked about before, to have the courage. Like when you are going to run 15000 meters. It will hurt but you take deep breaths and go into it. (Bo)

Both Antonia and Bo mention aspects of courage and personal vulnerability, I might be afraid and it might hurt. To have courage from this view could be to acknowledge that all of us have development areas and also to dare look at them and expose ourselves to things that might be outside our own comfort zone.

Your own choice is important to find your own energy and engagement. Even if there is a mission you can make it a part of yourself with your personal touch and tone. If we blame others and circumstances around us there always will be a risk that we also avoid looking at the things we can do differently. To show courage as a leader also can instil courage in

others, we become role models of how courage can be shown. If we are not perfect our employees also will have the courage to show that they are not perfect.

To believe in something always requires a risk because it is possible to fail but if we look at our failures as learning opportunities whatever happens will give us new experiences and learning.

Fluker (2009) highlights that true faith includes courage. It could be viewed as the power to be, to transform and create new realities. From this view courage also could be seen as a way of self-affirmation to become.

Leaders of today need courage to explore the unknown and unchartered territories of themselves and of human interactions. If we have limited self-awareness and without a driving force to challenge ourselves, many people may not travel beyond their own understanding and the map we have created for ourselves. If we keep to our 'old' understanding and pre-assumptions we will never experience parts in the country that are outside the roads we are used to walk. If we imagine a picture of a landscape it is easy to understand that the world is full of beauty that we cannot see if we don't change perspectives or walk another road and also leave the road. Many beautiful places that we could not imagine will be found when we allow ourselves to get lost. But to have courage to look for these new places and to get lost we need to trust ourselves and support others to trust us.

Antonia also highlighted one aspect of courage as showing equality – to as a leader not prefer someone before someone else. This could be seen as the courage to stand alone and avoid building our self-confidence through allies.

If we view courage from the perspective of personal development, courage must be seen from the eyes of the one who acts into being brave. What is courage for me might not be a brave thing for another person to do. I believe that when we talk about leadership, we will find big courage in small actions.

To trust employees could also be seen as an act of being brave and to trust the process, to trust that people will find their way if they are invited into co-creation. The co-created

organisations are from my view best supported by a leader who is brave in his or her trust of others, a leader that trusts that others will manage, that people have potential. But an organisation also benefits from a leader that trusts him or herself as a facilitator and enabler. To be laid back and in some way to acknowledge that we don't have the control we think we have and let others take their responsibility could be very brave especially for a person who is fond of the idea of having control.

Courage from my view ends up in looking outside my own understanding and to have a curiosity to learn.

To be able to lead we need to be brave and dare to stand in the front. We need to manage to take blame and criticism without blaming someone else. I also believe that we show our courage as leaders in how genuine we are in our wish to be there for others in the organisation and enable and support them to do their work in the best way they can. It is brave to acknowledge that we are dependent on others.

The importance of trust and to care

Trusting others and to trust ourselves could from my view also be seen as very important prerequisites for successful collaboration with others. If people become in relation to how we approach them, our belief in them will make a difference. Everyone has unexplored potentials. To give people the unique prerequisites to be able to work optimally, we need to believe that they have resources and potential, we need to trust them to enable them to grow. To be able to feel trust could be seen as personal ability that we need to work on all the time. In some relations and different contexts our ability to feel trust will be more or less available. If we can navigate our self by becoming more aware of when we feel trust and when we have difficulties to feel trust, we also will be able to develop our self toward more trust. We can be curious about what we need to increase our own trust but also challenge our own taken for granted views. Our trust will enable people to grow and take responsibility.

With trust also comes a genuine care for others. Antonia says;

I care a lot about everyone who works here and I don't want to misuse the power I have got in my position. It is important for me that everyone has the opportunity to grow as much as possible. We also have small talks together about what is necessary for everyone to grow. I expect that most of them can make own decisions. I also try to train them to make own decision. I want to be honest and say things that are constructive. You need to be brave and address things that haven't been great to enable a positive change. There are a lot of things that could be said if it is said with warmth and thoughtfulness.

Many times it feels like our organisation is a greenhouse and nursery, people grow and they will move forward and the things that have grown are good to spread to other organisations and units.

Antonia highlights that the ability to grow as an employee can be supported if the leader cares but also challenges in a warm and thoughtful way. I believe that there is a tension between caring too much and too little. If we care too little people will become objects and if we care too much there might be risk that we protect and also signal that people are victims. The balance of showing empathy and being brave to challenge people is not always easy.

All of the leaders in different ways expressed that they did care for their employees and they also addressed trust as important. What it is that enables leaders to feel trust is another question that also could have been interesting to ask. Are these personal abilities and a mind-set, like John says that he through his childhood learned to trust people? Anna says something similar that she thinks good about people until the opposite has been shown. Or is it something that people do that enables us to trust them or both?

Trust and confidence is something that grows and can be developed, it is something we need to care for and cannot be taken for granted.

Listening skills

One important part of communication that also most of the leaders mentioned was the importance of listening. If we would ask adults I guess that most would say that they have had a lot of experience in listening to others. But I am curious about how people think

about their ability to listen with a presence and about their possibilities to develop their listening skills. The quality of the listening we offer differs a lot. It is by listening and using our different senses we will grow our understanding. Our way of listening will be dependent on if we are curious. Our listening skills will also be influenced by and constructed in the moment and dependent on the setting in which we are listening and on our relation to the one who is speaking and how he or she speaks to us.

What we hear is dependent on how we experience the words that are spoken and the generalised picture we get. One trap is that even if we recognise with joy we might get trapped in our own understanding and we might also lose our curiosity for other possible understandings and other feelings than ours. I think that many of us have learned to socialise in a way that we affirm each other's thoughts, we also might want to show that we are alike, it is easy to think that we think the same. As leaders it can be a challenge to take the position of not knowing at the same time as we would like to acknowledge someone. It is easy to end up in our own understanding and pictures whatever they are experienced as positive or negative. To listen genuinely to someone we need to have interest in and trust in that this person has something important to tell and learn us. Antonia reflects on trust;

I think that trust is something very subtle, if they notice that they can trust me. I want to see my employees every day and to listen to them, how they are doing. It is important to show trust, confidence and to be there. I am very present in the moment and also take part of the daily work. This means that I must be curious about them. (Antonia)

Antonia highlights different aspects of the importance of listening and she shows that listening is part of her daily leadership and to be curious of how people are doing. She draws connections between trust and listening and that if people are listened to, they also can feel that they are supported and can be braver. From this view to listen actively also ends up in having trust in people and that we show this by listening, they have important views that are worth listen to. Trust could be viewed both from having trust and experiencing trust.

I believe that genuine listening occurs when we try to imagine walking in the landscape where others walk, when we are curious about and try to get a glimpse of their unique understanding. The tricky thing is that with use of words as generalised pictures we need

to search beyond the words and to be curious about their individual meaning. When you say that, what do you mean?

If we develop our ability of listening genuinely, I also believe that the new things we experience will make us even more curious. When we listen we also will get glimpses of people's potentials and get clues to how we can move on in our interactions.

Appreciative approach

I have come to know during this process that to understand what it means to have an appreciative approach differs a lot. It can be a genuine belief and trust in others and be guided by altruistic values, but it can also be methods that leaders use to get what they want, and belief that if we encourage and give positive feedback something good will happen. My hope is that if leaders genuinely come to believe in and experience a hopeful way of interacting with people in their organisations and develop a genuine curiosity, the 'appreciative approach' could become a genuine way of living. Anna describes it as follows;

I have the philosophy to believe in everyone up to 110%. I assume that everyone is doing their best. I think it is important to believe in people and their capacity. I believe that there is an enormous capacity within everyone. My task as a manager is to find and develop this capacity. Then they will grow and they will also create new business. It is great when they can push themselves.

Anna shares a very optimistic and trustful view in relation to her employees. She shows that her wish to find and develop capacity is one of her main tasks as a leader. Antonia tells a similar story about the importance that employees feel proud of what they are doing and could do and that her task is to support them to grow.

I think it is important for people to have pride in what they do. Many times people evolve over the ability they think they have if we as leaders believe they can and believe in them. Many people become surprised that they can. I experience that many people settle on a lower level than they could have. I think many managers may experience it as a threat if the employees grow too much. I do not see it as a threat but see it as, well, they might disappear. My goal is not personal, but to make sure people are growing here. It is so clear

that many of them, I think everyone here is great but this is also something that we have been working at. They basically can do whatever they want. (Antonia)

This connects to the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal, 1968) and the idea that expectations can essentially affect reality and create self-fulfilling prophecies as a result. I experience that both Anna and Antonia believe that everyone has an enormous capacity that they can use if they get trust and encouragement.

All the participants highlight the importance of an appreciative approach and their descriptions cover all the actions we have as leaders, starting with our mind-set, how we think about ourselves, others and how we act.

It is easy to think that to be appreciative is the same as talking about things that work and avoiding problem talk, but from my view it highlights aspects of how we can talk about difficult things in new ways. It is easy to think that with an appreciative approach we should not dig in problems. From my view we will approach problems in a different and more curious way, we will look behind and beyond the problems to explore what the problem says about what is important to people and what they are concerned about. The appreciative approach that acknowledges people's understanding and how people have made sense invites us into exploring different meanings and understandings, it recognises and values people. Even if we have different views this makes it possible to give people dignity and makes them experience that they are important and have something to contribute with.

For me the appreciative approach ends up with valuing people's constructions. This does not mean that we need to agree but we can find ways that allow us leaders to be assertive and express our own perspectives and beliefs at the same time as we invite and acknowledge others' views.

In the appreciative culture, a culture where we believe in people and where people are appreciated and trusted, innovation and creativity also will grow. We will become braver when others believe in us and do things that we might not normally do. In the appreciative culture we appreciate people's good intentions, that they try and we acknowledge mistakes as learning opportunities. To support an appreciative culture is one important leadership

field but the appreciative culture is also something that everyone needs to take responsibility for. The trick then becomes how I as a leader can influence and contribute to an appreciative culture and approach that everyone will take responsibility for.

While I was writing this chapter, one of my friends called me and told me about her organisation. She said that she was tired, she felt unmotivated and that she didn't even bother to give her best; why should she? My friend said that she had a high salary. Each day they were also served cakes and sweets, each Friday they had 'Friday beer' with a lot of good things to eat with the beer and wine. They were invited to weekend trips to Mallorca and other places to have fun and party together. But my friend said that the working place was awful. None of the owners / leaders said hello when they met employees in the corridors, they never held open the door to anyone else. She had the sense of not being worth anything. This feeling now influenced my friend to look for a new job. She said that she didn't give her best nor did the other employees. It is easy to assume that the leaders wanted to encourage the employees by giving them things. Maybe they thought that they showed appreciation and that these gifts would motivate the employees. But appreciation is experienced in how it is lived. I became fascinated by the idea of what if the employees just gave 50% of their potential, what a waste of resources. It is fascinating the effect a simple 'hello' can have, being acknowledged in the corridor. How many organisations have similar issues? How many organisations have not yet realised the power of people's resources / potentials and the possibilities that lie in interaction and co-creation based on that people truly experience themselves as important and appreciated?

With an appreciative approach we acknowledge people, we build on what is working well and what people are proud of. I strongly believe that every organisation has a lot of things that work well and a lot of things to be proud of. I also believe that every person has more skills and potential than they or we know and can imagine. From an appreciative view I also would like to view coping strategies instead of looking at people as victims.

But I also think that it is important to remember that we are humans and it is not easy to always be appreciative. Life gives us a lot of challenges and also learning opportunities to develop ourselves.

If we are stuck in looking for what is wrong, focusing on the problems, then the energy and pride will decrease and we might also lose sight of people's potential and what is possible. Instead, focusing on life-giving stories and pride will invite people into feeling good about themselves and their contributions. To lift forward the stories that make us feel good also supports us with energy to move forward in many times challenging situations and to be able to use our resources in the best way.

Creating context, direction and clarity

When the leaders spoke about what was important for them for executing their leadership in a good way, they talked about clarity and knowing the direction. In the similar way they mentioned that it is important that the members of the organisation know the context and direction. When I talked with Anna about the importance of employees knowing the direction she said:

It is a huge, a big difference when you know where you are going. If you go in one direction and have a mission to provide, the energy will come; otherwise it is easy that it takes energy. It is easy to slip into a side track. (Anna)

Mary shared a metaphor of a group of lemmings that are walking over the hills in one direction. If one falls out of the line you need to get them on track again. Gustav also used the metaphor of the ship on the sea and says that people need to know where they are heading even though we might need to sometimes get back to the first harbour or visit other places on the way. Everyone needs to know what the goal is to be able to give their best energy.

Korn (2011) writes about the importance of leaders' ability to facilitate processes and to reach the end. He says that one important aspect of this is the leader's ability to provide contextual markers to our audience. Korn points out that the search for context markers is always an ongoing instinctive process. Korn says that we search for markers because we are heavily reliant on our ability to reference anything new with something we already know. The markers provide us with the ability to pull out the 'most relevant' set of references. Korn says further that our interactions can be even more value added if we also add more

dynamic markers, markers that establish contexts where we can readily explore and understand values, ethics and personal preference; contexts where we can openly share ideas, doubts and challenges; and contexts where we can reach decisions with mutual understanding and appreciation.

In order to understand communication, it is crucial to understand the context from which people are communicating. From Korn's view but also from what the leaders have highlighted, the ability to clarify the context – to create a frame from which we can understand each other – is an important ability for leaders to have and to develop but also an important prerequisite for creating the optimal organisation.

If the context is clear, members will more easily understand the goal, connect emotionally to it and use their own resources in the best way. They will know what is expected from them in terms of participation and contribution and they will be able to explore and act out of their unique manoeuvring space.

Korn (2011) also highlights the importance of being guided by different context markers in daily work. He leads our attention to the connection between context markers, meaning-making processes and the ability to learn. I think that it is easy to forget that people need guidance also in daily conversations and in different meetings, if people know the purpose it will be much easier to contribute in a good way. I think that the view of a leader as a facilitator is interesting and this highlights the leader's ability to create a meaningful, clear and useful context that could be understood by the people who participate. From this view leaders also could be seen as a host for different meetings. And the question is what constitutes a good host?

Contextual clarification is important for the members of the organisation to be able to understand the goal and imagine what it can look like. In order to be able to communicate in a clear way to the rest of the organisation the leaders also need to have clear context. The leader's ability to be clear and to communicate the goal but also to find ways to involve the rest of the organisation in the goals, to co-create and create meaning in relation to the task will be important.

The power of co-creation

*The organisation consists of us, each single one of us. We are the whole and each little piece is important. Where did we get the idea that one single man or woman could take the whole responsibility? When did we forget all the potential that is there to be released? When did men and women get lost in the idea that some people are better or more important than others? When will we experience that the possibilities are right there in front of us and that we are stronger together? It will happen when we realise that all of us are important and that the strengths are within '*us*'.* (Kicki Oljemark, 2012).

All of the leaders mentioned aspects of the importance of collaboration, participation in different ways. From this view I believe that the power of co – creation also has come to their experience. They are talking about moving towards the same goal, working in teams etc.

"I notice collaboration in the way that the people who work in this organisation work together towards the same goal. I notice on the people that they are happy and innovative together. They are creative in the way they work together to enable our organisation to give its best. Many times it is possible to get into an organisation and feel the good and collaborative atmosphere.

I notice the good atmosphere in the way my employees' talk about how much they appreciate that we have the same goal and how the values in our organisations live within all of us. I experience how they feel connected by the mission and values we have. I also notice pride and they shares good stories with each others and they are all enthusiastic. Our concept with different professionals who work close together to meet the costumers needs have been very successful, there is a natural collaboration. People discuss with each others and together we make a pretty damn good program.

I believe and have learned that even if people belong to a very big organisation it will be important to everyone to feel connected to the whole and also to belong to a smaller context which is more possible to overview. It is important that people feel that they have a belonging and also a possibility to influence. It is important to feel safe in this smaller context and that there is a we-feeling. Everyone also needs to know what they should do,

that it is clear. If this exist people will be able to come to work with joy. When people belong to a context that they can overview and experience that they belong to a bigger cog people will grow, take more responsibility and I believe that the company also will be more valuable and get better economy" Gustav"

My personal experience which is also strengthened through this research is that people will be most motivated to strive toward change and development and to give their best if they experience that what they do is meaningful but also when they experience that they are important and can contribute in a meaningful way. I think that people to a higher degree will have a wish to contribute if they experience that they can. The only thing we know for sure about organisations today is that there is and will be change. We live in a world of change. People also have their own dreams about what they see is possible for them. As leaders we have the possibility to focus on visions of the future, a future where everyone in the organisations is important. Leaders can bring people into the process of imagining the goals and what it can look like. Leaders can also explore and develop value-related aspects and skills in the process. I am convinced that if people experience that they are important and invited as important to co-create the future, they also will take more responsibility to work toward the goals.

Texts about appreciative Inquiry as I have mentioned in the part of my theoretical assumptions highlight what we can achieve with co creation but also how it can be done. (Cooperrider & Witney, 2005; Cooperrider et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2008) Also in the systemic literature we will find these aspects very important. (Barge, 2006; Lang & McAdam, 2009)

I believe that we as humans become secure, self-confident and are driven forward with the help of many small achievements; the experience that we can manage things. In the co-created organisation each person's daily input will become important. If we look at what we have done, what we do and what we can do, we will find a wide range of contributions and possible contributions.

One natural invitation could be to imagine the goal together and catch the strengths of 'us' and what we can do and be together. If we invite everyone in the system into the 'room' to imagine the vision, taking part in the planning and strategies, we will have an infinite source

of resources to reach the goal. Each person will be important and can contribute to the process. But this invitation brings even more into account. Another important thing is also that people will have the opportunity to increase their understanding of each other. When I experience that I am important, it will also be easier for me to listen to others' views. I can both be proud of myself and what I belong to.

Stories of who we are and could be will create the 'we' identity and trust will be able to increase when we develop our understanding for each other. This will in turn influence motivation. To experience that I belong to something that I am proud of and to have colleagues that I appreciate, to have the sense of togetherness even if we are different will from my view increase work satisfaction and joy.

With limited understanding about ourselves and others and without a clear goal it is easy to lose track of who we are and where we are heading. As leaders we have the mandate to show the direction and how we do this will be important. We need to be clear so that we avoid misunderstandings. In order to enable people to move toward a certain direction they also need to have their own wish to do so. If people have not made their own choices to participate and a wish to co-construct, it will be a risk that they will be stuck in old ways of thinking, working, habits and patterns that they are used to and feel safe with.

We can invite the co-created organisation in many ways. I believe that the curiosity about others' views that I have mentioned before becomes an invitation. By our curiosity we show that we are interested in each person in the organisation and what he or she thinks, people's resources, dreams and values but also his/her potential. Curiosity can be communicated in many ways and it is also shown in the documents we write and in invitations to different meetings. Even if we mainly communicate by email and documents, how we write them and acknowledge others will make a difference.

I have a strong belief that we can lead through questions; we will direct energy and focus toward the things we ask about. The questions and their answers also invite people into a genuine co-construction. I have experienced that questions can be magical. I have become wise in the way I ask questions but the people whom I have asked have become wise in the way that the questions enable them to put words on their wisdom and to share their knowledge.

As leaders, we will have many challenges and one is our urge to know. It might have its roots in that we would like to be great leaders and able to answer questions, we want to contribute in a good way and we want to be appreciated. Sometimes our employees invite us into becoming the ones with the answer and the one that ends up with the responsibility. But 'forgive them'; they might not realise their own potential.

People become leaders for various reasons but no one can be a leader for others without willing followers or collaborators. From my understanding leadership is a complex relationship between people and a process. Leadership is based on trust, commitment, emotions and a shared vision of goals and mission. Leadership is about development, change and sharing common purpose and values in the organisation. Leadership could be seen as holding together and framing the things we are doing together.

Summary: possibilities to influence

I experience a huge amount of hope in all the leaders' descriptions about possibilities. Despite struggles, conflicts and whatever obstacles that might be in organisations there are always things we can do as leaders. Many of the possibilities that I experience they talk about is their own mind-set; this is shown in for example to have a belief in people's capacity, to have and show trust, an appreciative approach and to be curious. The way leaders think about their mission, view the world and members of the organisation becomes crucial in the sense of possibilities. From this view our self confidence and trust in one self as a leader becomes important. When we trust and appreciate ourselves we also can develop our self-awareness more and see the 'mistakes' we make as learning opportunities.

All of the leaders highlighted the wish to learn in different ways as crucial for leadership and to pay attention to self-development. To appreciatively invite aspects of never ending learning and reflections for both leaders and the rest of the members in the organisation will be fundamental to enable everyone to give their best. The optimal organisation will be strongly connected to our growing mind-set, how we think, adjust, and develop earlier experiences and thoughts to be able to experience new things and act in new ways.

Values became an important part of the leaders' stories, experiences of values that they have found meaningful but also what they value and care for. From this view I also would like to address the importance of the manoeuvring space I experience they have in relation to the values they would like to live. Independent of things they need to do or produce, they have a freedom to approach people in different ways and to invite into different conversations. But what we value might need to be transformed in a way that becomes meaningful and understandable for our organisation and people in the organisation. Our values as leaders will be lived and understood by our actions and the consequences of our actions. If we have not expressed our values clearly, people might translate what we do in their own way and maybe they want experience the things we would like them to experience.

Shotter (2005) writes that as soon as I begin an interchange of looks with another person and I sense them as looking toward me in a certain way, a little ethical and political world is created between us. We each look toward each other expectantly, with anticipation, some shared, some not, arising from what we have already lived in our lives so far. Shotter highlights that in any living contact between any two or more human beings; at least two things occur in meetings between us. A new form of life emerges between us, a collective or shared form of life with its own unique character and its own unique world, in those terms for the duration of our meeting; we can mean things to each other. But also within this world we are 'present' to each other as who we are at least to a minimal extent, we can see into each other – hence, if it is a stranger with whom we have become involved, we quickly look away again, lest we reveal too much of ourselves unnecessarily. In our living contact with others or otherness, then, our mere surroundings are transformed into a world and at least a partially shared world that we sense ourselves as being in along with the others and otherness around us. What is ethical is entailed in our coming to an understanding of them, of their life, their inner life – not just in our terms, but in theirs.

Shotter's words invite me into the idea that we are creating worlds or partially shared worlds together when we meet. Shotter argues that ethics is entailed when we come to understand others, their life not just in our terms but in theirs. The way I would like to understand Shotter's words is that we create worlds together but these worlds include different worlds and understandings that live side by side. We cannot share worlds before we try to understand others' worlds. The shared world will be when we to some degree

understand others' worlds within our common world and that different life worlds can live side by side in our world. From this view leadership also influences how organisational worlds are created. Each step we take as leaders will influence the growing culture that will be the essence and soul of the organisation and where different understandings can live comfortable side by side and collaborate and co-create a common purpose.

Leadership and possibilities – emerged theory and reflections

"She, who wants to have right without wrong, order without disorder, does not understand the principles of heaven and earth, she does not know, things hang together". Chuang Tzu, fourth century B.C

Introduction

The literature review below will show some aspects of how I from a systemic leadership practice view inspired by a socialconstructionist perspective connect to literature within the field. The discussion below will have connections to themes that has arose from the interviews but mainly connected to how I have come to approach sense-making of leadership with connection to possibilities.

Social constructionist definitions of leadership and being a leader

Fairhurst & Grant (2010) write that literature draws on a variety of definitions of social constructionism, multiple constructs. They say further that many scholars have challenged the individual and cognitive lens of leadership psychology, introducing a lens that is more social and cultural, one that doesn't simply put communication into an act of outcome or input status.

The authors say that social constructionist leadership approaches commonly exhibit two interrelated characteristics. First, they eschew a leader centric approach where the leader's personality, style, and or behaviour are primary while they determine influences on followers' thoughts and actions. Second emphasis is given to leadership as co constructed reality, in particular, the process and outcomes of interaction between and among social actors. Communicative practices- talk, discourse, and other symbolic media – occasioned by

the context are integral to the process by which social construction of leadership is brought out (Fairhurst, 2009).

Leadership is described by Collinson (2006) and Grint (2000; 2005) as co constructed, a product of socio-historical and collective meaning making, and negotiated on an on-going basis through a complex interplay among leadership actors, be the emergent leaders, managers and followers. This description from my view invites the aspects of leadership as always evolving but also as being understood both by the leader and by the receiver.

Fairhurst & Grant (2010) says that too many studies offer broad, not specific definitions, constructs and a bewildering array of methods, approaches and perspectives. As a result the authors say that how people talk about and analyse what it is to be a leader and leadership using a social constructionist lens also varies considerably. They say that the body of knowledge within this field is still very wide and limited.

From this view it is not possible to find one definition. What I can do is to share a platform for some ground assumptions and how I view being a leader, leadership and leading from these assumptions.

The social constructionist perspective brings social processes to the foreground (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1999; Harré, 1986; Shotter, 1993; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010) and has its roots in symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) and phenomenology (Shutz, 1970). The social processes highlight relational aspects, communication and how we as humans in organisations come to interact in a more or less constructive and meaningful way. These aspects puts both being a leader, leadership and to lead into the context of being socially constructed where leaders influence and becomes influenced. From my view social processes also highlight leadership as non-static. Leadership will constantly emerge based on what leaders experience and learn through interactions with other members of the organisation and how leaders act out of these experiences and possible learnings.

Fairhurst & Grant (2010) writes that the perspective of social processes we will offer us an alternative to the western intellectual tradition where the researcher earnestly seeks certainty in a representation of reality. Hacking (1999) views it as in social constructionist

terms, taken for granted realities are produced from interactions between and among social agents.

Furthermore Fairhurst and Grant say that reality is not some objective truth that is waiting to be uncovered through positivistic inquiry. Rather there can be multiple realities that compete for truth and legitimacy. With the focus on interaction the social constructionist perspective I add to what constitute and develop leadership naturally recognises the fundamental role of language and communication (Barge, 2001; Barge & Little, 2002; Cronen, 2001; Lang & Mc Adam, 1998; 2012; Lang, Little & Cronen, 1990). These are aspects that also have been described in the theory approach to methodology.

Most social constructionists adhere to the belief that language does not mirror reality; rather it constitutes it, it is a medium by which the negotiation and construction of meaning takes place (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Scmisseeur & Fairhurst, 2008). If we view these ideas to a focus on leadership how we describe what it is to be a leader and leadership also will constitute leadership. These aspects will from my view pay particularly attention to ethical aspects and how we as researchers and theorists also are a part of constituting constructions of leadership.

Social constructionists are more likely to endorse the eye of the beholder view of leadership (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010); this is because what counts as a situation and what counts as the appropriate way of leading in the situation are interpretive and contestable issues, not issues that can be decided by objective criteria.

Barker (2001) describes leadership and leading as a process of transformative change where ethics of individuals (the leader, him or herself) are integrated into morals of the community as means of evolutionary social development. Hoskins (1998) in a similar way links leadership and leading to influential acts of organising and highlights the essential of viewing leadership processes.

Fairhurst & Grant (2010) express what they see as a turning away from classical, objectivistic management and science to solve problems. Instead an interest is shown in how narratives and conversation shapes organisational processes and change. They say that discourse creates and reinforces certain mind-sets that ultimately shape behaviour and

vice versa. This also includes the potential existence of multiple socially constructed realities and a growing appreciation that certain power structures require change vis a vis the story lines that created them in the first place.

This view pays attention to the importance of what conversations we invite to, to enable different storylines to come to life. It also highlights that we become in the stories we tell about ourselves and our organisations. How I describe my work will make a difference in how I perceive it. Leadership could from this view above be an important contributor to explore and strengthen helpful and meaningful stories that give energy and strength. This could be seen as stories that make people proud of themselves, their contribution and invites into possibilities and development.

Leadership and to lead within living relationships

Pearce (1995) welcome the potential innovation and creativity that social constructionism brings to communication studies. Gareth Morgan (1997) in his turn writes that effective managers and professionals in all walks of life have to become skilled in the art of reading the situations they are attempting to organise or manage. These skills usually develop as an intuitive process, learned through experience and natural ability. If we take a closer look this mystique and power from the author's view often is based on an ability to develop deep appreciation of the situations being addressed. Morgan says that skilled leaders develop an ability to read situations with various scenarios in mind and develop actions that seem appropriate to the understanding thus obtained. They have the capacity to remain open and flexible and wait with judgements until a more comprehensive view of the situation emerges. They are aware that new insights often arise as one approach situations from new angles and that a wide and varied reading can create a wide and varied range of action possibilities.

Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee (2000) highlights the importance of emotional intelligence and leadership and they say that a leader cannot manage his or her emotions well if he or she is not aware of them. If his or her emotions are without control his or her ability to handle relationships and to lead will suffer. The authors put the light on four domains of emotional

intelligence; Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relational management. Self-awareness will be from the authors' view the foundation for the rest. Without recognising our own emotions our ability to manage them will be limited. This will also limit our ability to understand others' emotions. By developing our self-awareness we can be attuned to our inner signals. We can recognise how our feelings affect ourselves and our work performance. Self-awareness also plays a crucial role in our ability for empathy and our ability to understand how another person might understand a situation. By being more self-aware of our own emotions we also can develop our ability to tune into how others might feel.

Social awareness is described by the authors as particularly empathy which will support the task of driving resonance. By being attuned to how others feel in the moment, a leader can develop his or her abilities to approach in the best way and to say and do what is appropriate in the moment.

Shotter & Cunliffe (2003) write that change is occurring in our attitudes to human inquiry. They raise the similar issues as Morgan and say that leaders today are moving away from the idea of analysing their surroundings objectively as external observers. Instead leaders should develop abilities to conduct their inquiries in terms of the special practical understanding that emerges from the interplay between our own responsive expressions towards others and their equally responsive expressions towards us. From this view managers can recognise the living relationship within their everyday practice.

The authors highlight what they call "relationally responsive activities" and say that it is the openness in these activities that makes these jointly structured activities incomplete. They can always be specified and determined yet further by those involved in the contexts which will clarify and involve other members in the organisation. These aspects from my view both highlight the complexity related to relational aspects in organisations but also the possibilities there are in being a leader and with leadership. Like Shotter and Cunliffe move on and say that within dialogically structured activities with a unique sense of shared circumstances people are able to act in ways intelligible to each other. This could from my view be understood as that if we have clarity, a shared sense and structured activities, we will be able to have meaningful and constructive dialogues and conversations. But how do we know that we share this sense? From a leader's view these aspects from my perspective

pay attention to the leader as being a context creator. The relational leader from my view invites into conversations where members of the organisation can create meaning together, increase their understanding of each-others, their context and how they can move forward related to the goal of the organisation.

As we move on together certain styles or ways of speaking, certain "language games" may become intertwined in our shared practice (Wittgenstein, 1953). I connect Wittgenstein's words to that these language games represent the developed shared sense and that sense is in many aspects contextualised, but we also have our earlier experiences with us. To acknowledge members earlier experiences once more invite the importance of clarity with certain focus on aim, direction, task and responsibility within organisational activities.

The relationally responsive activities that Shotter and Cunliffe (2003) highlight invites us as leaders to reflect on how we can take part in creating sense and meaning in a helpful way for the organisation and its members.

Dialogical relational view of being a leader and leadership

Barge & Fairhurst (2008) argue for organisational actors to operate in communication and through discourse. From this view what they call leadership actors co-create their subjectivities -personal and professional identities, relationships, communities and cultures- in communication through linguistic and embodied performances. Communicative actions can from the authors' view modify and elaborate existing connections among actors, action, meaning and context or create new ones. Based on these aspects communication and how a leader communicates will in high degree define how the leader and his or her leadership will be experienced.

Shotter and Cunliffe in their turn (2003) pay attention to that if we as leaders develop our communication we will be able to express and specify intricate ways in which our practices may be refined, elaborated or otherwise be made more fitting for our circumstances. This also pays attention to the words we use and Shotter (1993) invites us to study words in their speaking. We can within the moment as leaders and organisations unfold relationally

responsive events that will occur in the interactive moment. From this view leadership possibilities also could be seen as managing communication to create meaning in a relationally responsive way. This evokes the question of how we as leaders with a developed awareness of our communication can be careful with how we through our language constitute our own and others' social realities and sense of self.

Winograd & Flores (1986) say that rather than urging managers to study theories established for them by outsiders, by scientific experts, the responsibilities as managers would be to participate in conversations for possibilities. This will in its turn open up new backgrounds for conversations that will allow new actions. This view highlights that we as leaders will find the main source for development in our own organisations and that it is new ways of having meaningful conversations that will open up for meaningful actions and possibilities.

Shotter and Cunliffe (2003) also say that we don't need yet more or different theories in management studies but a better understanding how conversations intertwine with an organisation's other activities and how such intertwining can lead to creation of yet further kinds of conversationally structured realities. The authors argue for the special knowledge from within us as conversationally competent human beings. Communication skills once more become vital in developing our leadership and how we will be perceived as leaders. But from the view I see our communication starts with the view we take on ourselves and others.

The self and what kind of leader I want to be?

Wheatley (2000) gives me a helpful description of self; self is not a selfish individual; "self" includes awareness of those others and it must relate to as part of its system. Leaders belong to a system and relationships and are based on ongoing interactions within this system. In a living system self-reference is the source of growth, of increasing vitality.

Grint (2000) says that we may regard the construction of the identity as a critical element and task of leadership but it is in philosophical endeavours that one's identity will be

considered and constructed and it is also through philosophy we start to answer the question who we are.

But there is in my view more to being a leader and leadership than answering the question who we are. From the social constructionist view I take it is not possible to define who we are. We become in relationship and within interactions with others. As leaders we need to be aware of how we become a part of creating who others will become in relationship to our position, role and to us, our communication and interactions. In the position of being a manger and leader we have a certain power which I believe in a high degree will influence the rest of the members of the organisation and who they will become but also related to peoples earlier experiences and ideas about this power.

Morgan (1997) writes that we are leaving the age of the organised organisation and moving into an era where the ability to understand, facilitate and encourage processes of self-organisation has become a key competence for leaders. These aspects also pay attention to for us as leaders in our leadership to develop our ability to understand, to be curious of different ways of understanding and developing meaningful ways of facilitating different contexts.

Shotter says (1993) that the basic practical-moral problem of life is not what to do but what kind of person to be. Who we would like to become as leaders from my view invites aspects of values and ethical leadership.

Shotter and Cunliffe write (2003) that managers author a sense of their own identities and the identities of those around them. To be authors of one's own identity pays attention to that we can change and influence how we become. We also as leaders become invited into the action of authoring our own leadership development and leader identity.

Shotter (2006) refers to the similar appreciative ideas as I have been discussing and to look with the eyes of wonder could from Shotter's view be expressed as for example to "*hear something new of possibilities in the nuances and tones of those around them"* .This listening would from Shotter's view create new possibilities for action and new ways of being and acting.

Shotter says that a good manager does not enact a series of activities, roles or core competencies but recognises managing as a way of being with others in terms set by their organisation's momentary landscape. The momentary landscape gives a wonderful picture of never ending change and evolution. But from my view this metaphor also from my view pays attention to the importance of the direction. To be in the momentary landscape can be very complex and chaotic if we do not know where we are heading and are able to as leaders lead ourselves and our own emotions as well as others.

Shotter follows that to be able to do this managers need to be sensitive to their environment and see their surroundings in a special way, thus they must not just see the given conditions, which all in the organisation must face, they must also see them a fresh as for another yet first time. They must see them as offering, permitting or affording new possibilities unnoticed by others. They must then be able to linguistically, to stop others in their tracks to, to disrupt routine ways of seeing things, to draw attention to the presence of something previously unnoticed in their shared circumstances and give it a distinct initial formulation so that others can contribute toward its further specification.

This is interesting but the question is how to do this. If we acknowledge that we as leaders can develop our sense by reflecting probably the members' learning also will increase if they are able to imagine different aspects and hypotheses. The question then becomes how we as leaders can support the members of the organisation to imagine something new and to get the experience themselves instead of adding our picture and images.

Lang (2007) writes about the power of questions and how we can through leadership use storytelling to inspire people in times of change. Lang highlights the aspects of how we can create collaborative cultures in times of change but also the importance of the power of language and how we through language can create a creative life affirming tool.

This also from the author's view pays particular attention to values and valuing as the road to creating successful cultures. Lang says that organisations and business are created, sustained and developed through the language and stories we create. Winning cultures are achieved through the practice of creating good stories and appreciative storytelling.

From Lang's view the ability to ask questions that will create positive images and positive actions will be crucial for leaders. The approach of Appreciative inquiry is also one example of how life giving questions invite organisational members to explore, strengthen resources and to imagine the desirable future. But it is seldom from my view that literature has highlighted the possibilities there are for leaders to develop their questioning skills so that they, not just consultants, can look for, ask and support life giving stories. If leaders develop their appreciative questioning skills they will be able to use questions to support the rest of the members to be able to give their best. Through questioning skills the members can be invited into meaningful conversations related to the mission of the organisation. How managers will invite into stories that will create a successful future will be crucial.

Shotter (2006) says that managers, perhaps both consciously and unconsciously, help to construct an organisation's common sense by responding to aspects available to all in the conversational background and by creating shared ways of talking about features of its organisation. Managers can from creating and shaping features of their organisations landscape dramatise a not yet visible dynamic whole, which then can be take on presence by becoming a taken for granted part of shared organisational discourse. The approach of Appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003) also supports us with ways of imagining this future as co constructed process.

Shotter (2006) suggests that it is through responsive dialogue and linguistic practices that a shared organisational discourse or architecture emerges - sense of organisational reality, into which we can act.

The way I understand this is that leaders, through a clear direction, a vision but also by visualising, can support members of the organisation to use their resources in the best way. By approaching the view of another yet time we invite ourselves as leaders to avoid fixed ideas and to look outside our own boxes. We invite new understanding and a curiosity of what we not yet have understood or known and will from this view experience that there is a lot to find if we look for it.

Shotter &Cunliffe (2003) say that while we relate ourselves to our circumstances; adjust ourselves to the contours of the context, and the kind of knowing we need in dealing with those passing moments we call an events circumstance will develop our practical wisdom.

This once more highlights that we will learn through practice, within interactions and the learning we can gain from this will become our practical wisdom.

A dialogical perspective from my view also draws attention to how we relate with each other ethically. Leadership brings issues of social accountability and morality to the foreground by emphasising the nature of our being in relation to others.

Cunliffe (2002) says that a crucial aspect of ethical discourse is reflexive dialogical practice, engaging in dialogue to explore how our own actions and conversational practices may create and be sustained by particular way of relating and by implicit or explicit power relationships. She says that good managers must be good conversationalists. I find that this question invites us to reflect on how we as leaders can become responsive listeners and responsive speakers but also how we can interact responsively through conversations we are invited into or invite into.

I believe that we as leaders need to consider who we would like to become but also who we would like others to become in relationship to us. How would I as a leader like others to experience themselves in relationship to me as a leader? How can I as a leader interact and communicate in a way that will enable the members of the organisation to experience them-selves in a good way, as resourceful and important? How can we interact with others in a way that enables them to give their best and to use their resources and potential in the best way related to the task and mission? Who do I want to be to be able to contribute to this? What can I do to move towards this direction?

Systemic leadership sense-making and possibilities

Weick (1995) writes that the content of sense-making is to be found in the frames and categories that summarise past experience, in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experiences, and in ways these two settings of experiences are connected. I believe that our sense making also will be influenced by dreams and hopes for the future. By exploring own driving forces and hopes it is also from my view easier to connect them in a relevant and meaningful way for the organisation.

Fairhurst, Cooren & Cahill (2002) point out that how we talk about our own leadership will influence how we will make sense of it and what kind of leader we will become. The question is what kind of stories that could be helpful?

If we as Lord & Emrich (2001) put it acknowledge that the socially constructed understanding of the world will be derived from social exchanges and interactions, this will pay attention to how leaders can interact in the best way in the forefront.

From my view a systemic leadership approach enriches meaning for both ourselves as leaders but also for the members of the organisation.

Allen & Cherrey (2000) highlight aspects of optimising relationships and connections, relational thinking, understanding emotional dimensions and practicing new ways of relating. The authors describe that it is easy that a member of an organisation perceives their part of the organisation as autonomous part of the overall system. The authors say that this is an illusion because what we do in the different parts of the organisation will influence each other. One way to create meaning and a successful whole could from this view be to incorporate diverse ideas and perspectives, developing meaningful cross boundary relationships. And forming relationships based on trust and integrity. In a connected world the skills that will be found in an organisation will be of much greater importance than ever because one's value and effectiveness to the organisation will be directly proportional to one's relationship to the organisation. These ideas highlight aspects of the infinite resource we have in organisations but also to Antonovsky's (2005) ideas of sense of coherence. Antonovsky pays particularly attention to meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability.

Allen & Cherrey (2000) view relationships as the connective tissue of the organisation. If we as leaders can use and develop our ability to support development of relationships and a sense of coherence we will from my view act in a systemic way.

Traditionally, according to the authors, emotions have not had a place in organisations. Work has been a place for rationality. However this has begun to change and words with emotional implications have found their way into the organisations. How we as leaders will invite members of the organisation into conversations and images of what could be with

the emotional words we use will make a difference. We can invite into commitment, passion, joy and excitement and invite emotions that make people feel joy, pride more good about themselves.

In a networking organisation emotions will be a natural force of connecting to each other. How we experience our organisation and each other emotionally will influence our ability to connect and network.

Allen & Cherrey (2000) view new ways of relating in the systemic leadership. This could from the authors' view be fostering a trusting environment. Developing one's emotional intelligence and helping others to develop theirs. They also talk about sharing information widely to have a transparency in the organisation. This idea could also from my view acknowledge how information and knowledge are co-created and grow if we share and connect.

A systemic leadership from my view will be created in the organisation and through interactions but to be able to use ourselves as leaders in the best way we once more come back to the importance of our own personal and professional development. What we need today are reflections and discussions that truly and profoundly encourage and support the leaders' transformation. Systemic leadership will be an essential complement to other existing ideas. What could be said to distinguish systemic leadership is that old leadership models have a tendency to focus on the personality and abilities. In these perspectives the leader should develop new or strengthen skills or qualities such as becoming more determined and courageous.

Systemic leadership on the other hand focuses on becoming more acquainted with the dynamics in the organisation, context and in the interactions where the leader acts. The systemic leader aims at developing his or her interaction skills in a way that enables both him or herself and people there to give their best, develop their understanding and meaning making process in the best way in relationship to the goals of the organisation. Development of self-confidence will be related to a sense of meaning of how we can develop awareness of our interactions and the possibilities from these interactions with others. It will from my view be a matter of being ethical and how we through ethical actions can support and create positive results and change.

Cunliffe and Lun (2005) write that reflexivity draws attention to how we relate to each other ethically and how for example assumptions and use of words affect policies and therefore the social realities and identities of others. From this view the appreciative systemic leadership will be important. If leaders will inquire into life giving stories will make a difference

Summary

I have found during this research journey that if I and we view organisations as socially constructed and based on interactions and communication this would also naturally pay attention to the need of leaders' personal development. This development should naturally from a systemic view have the focus on development of meaningful and good interactions with members of the organisation, interaction and communication that will enable both leaders themselves and other members of the organisation to give their best. It will from my view not be possible to separate our self with our world views, feelings and values from the role of being a leader.

I find a development field with these aspects in mind within the field of systemic and socialconstructionist leadership research and literature. How can we combine ideas of leaders own personal development to the socially on momentary constructed organisation? How can we encourage leaders to learn and develop their leadership in relationship to the members they have in their organisations and the organisations goal instead of focusing on skills successful leaders should have? How can leaders be encouraged to develop their interactions and to interact in the best way in the socially constructed organisation so that people can give their best? How can leaders become more of enabler for others?

Leaders will always have challenges in the socially constructed organisation. It is not easy to be a leader and relational aspects make leadership very complex. In the living system new situations always will occur. But this living system and the complexity in relationships also gives us the possibilities. It makes a difference how we communicate and act and small things, like what words we use can make a huge difference. If leaders can identify situations and interactions where they experience that the interaction didn't become as fruitful as it could, this also could give leaders a hint on what they could and would like to achieve for

the future and how they can develop themselves. My belief is that managers in their role as leaders need to a greater extend take responsibility for meaningful and good interaction with the rest of the members of the organisation. In the position of being a manager we will find possibilities to develop interactions depending on how we act and interact as leaders.

I will let Cunliffe (2002) summarise possibilities connected to leadership and sense making. She says that a reflexive, dialogical leadership practice wherein reflexivity and dialogue is combined helps us to become aware of how our assumptions, ways of talking and our practical theories shape and are shaped by, our responsive interactions with others. I believe that this reflexive process combined with the manoeuvre space we can get by exploring and living our and others' values will make a huge difference.

Part three –

My sense-making and values in action

Introduction

In this last chapter I will develop ideas of how I have made sense of leadership possibilities. The whole chapter could be seen as summarising my learning and how my sense making has emerged through the process. The chapter will include a deepened literature review and it will be developed into what could be described as conceptualised idea of an ethical relational compass. The chapter will view themes that I have particularly found meaningful when I try to answer the questions of: how leaders make sense of leadership and the possibilities they have to influence their organisations to work optimally.

Different voices

The world is full of voices about methods and techniques that we are told that we can learn in a couple of days to manage the role and mission we have. I believe that most of the quick fix programmes have good intentions and that many of them also give new perspectives and useful techniques but I would like to argue that leadership development for the future is so much more.

It is easy to forget that leadership and to lead is very complex. To be able to use tools we need to understand when it is proper to use the tools, we also need to understand that the tools can lead to different results in different contexts and with different people. Different people and contexts influence us in different ways and I influence different people in different ways, nothing is static and there is no one way. We need to find our own inner core and focus on our own personal and professional development as one.

Treen (2011) writes that to learn behaviour traits from leaders is a way of learning the general results of their development. He says that this way tends to reduce leadership development to a quick fix and toward management techniques. According to Treen, techniques simplify the complexity to a simply programmed behavioural response which according to him breaks down because the contexts of application never repeat themselves. He says further that in essence leadership traits are not learnable in the form of behavioural traits because of the lack of a deeper understanding from practice and real

experience. He says that top down expert driven learning compresses development to a user manual so you can learn the quick fix. He says that this fails because we cannot compress years of development into rarefied techniques that can be learned in a short circuited process from management gurus on leadership development.

Andersen's story 'The Emperor's New Clothes' (1837) reminds me of the importance of being genuine as leader and to value our personal resources and growth. That we might pay too much attention to what could be offered us in the way of 'fancy costumes' or techniques and it is easy to forget that it is what is behind this surface that matters. I find interesting parallels with this story and how I experience the way some quick fix methods are delivered and received in Sweden. There are many convincing voices about what is the best and they are so convincing that we might even start to doubt ourselves. We don't want to be the ones who are not wise enough to understand that this is the best. I believe that behind most models and methods we can find good intentions and helpful wisdom, but I believe that they need to be understood from within ourselves and the context where we work to be really helpful. There is no quick way and no method in the world can compensate the knowledge and learning that can arise within interactions with others, when I get the opportunity to get to know myself, others and how we can interact in a fruitful way.

In some aspects I experience that the way of teaching quick fix methods and top down knowledge approaches us as leaders and humans as if we had limited learning potential. If we are taught in a behaviouristic way how we ought to act or what methods we ought to use to be good leaders this will only catch a very limited part of our potential. This way of 'being taught' also tends to invite the idea that we need experts to understand ourselves and what is best to do, people who have no knowledge about our organisation and the relationships we have and that live in our organisation.

I would lie if I would not recognise that if we are encouraged to do something different we also will be able to gain a lot of learning but I believe that to be able to use the learning we get in the best way and to develop ourselves further as leaders, we also need to reflect on what happened when we did something different and on what we can learn from this experience.

We live in a society that offers myriads of quick fix alternatives for leaders. In the way we talk about leadership these ideas and method also become ‘a truth’ about what is needed. No one wants to be worse than anybody else. To be able to look upon yourself and your organisation as the most updated one and with the latest ideas it is easy to join the latest movement. Treen (2011) says that most of the multimillions of dollars that are spent in this field are wasted. He argues that we need to step back and look at the facts of how leaders actually did develop. Treen argues for bottom up development for leaders, to start with the roots from your own life, your personal values, struggles, victories joy and pain.

Never ending learning

I believe that on our journey to learn and develop our selves, theory and methods could be useful. But we need to be flexible related to different contexts and interactions, to adapt the way we approach, communicate and interact in a careful way. A strong focus on theory and methods could from my view limit our sight of whom we would like to be, how we would like others to experience us, and the focus on what we would like to achieve with our mission.

I believe that when we have explored who we would like to be, we also can get support by methods to become who we would like to be.

My experience is that we have an ocean of learning opportunities if we reflect on our interactions with others. I believe that we need to experience something different to understand the difference. We need to look for new experiences by challenging our own mind-set and do new things.

How I act as a leader will make a huge difference, my self-confidence, the values I live and the approach I take matter. But to be able to change myself I need to feel safe, I need to trust myself and I need to trust people around me to be able to invite them very actively into the process of change.

Peter Lang (2007) writes that learning most effectively takes place when people are in a positive, appreciative environment, free from shaming and blaming. This is from my view also important aspects for leaders. If we feel shame or if we blame ourselves, we will not

have optimal conditions for change. We need to, as leaders, find ways to appreciate ourselves, what we do and our good intentions in a way that develops our confidence and makes us relaxed and comfortable in our many times challenging and complex profession.

Lang highlights the power of language as a creative, life affirming tool. From this view the words we use when we have inner dialogues with ourselves and conversations with others will make a difference for ourselves as well as for others. Lang says that it is important to give a central place to values and valuing the road to creating successful cultures in organisations. How to create optimal organisation from the way above and my understanding becomes a process and that the actual process has its own and very important value. We become through this process and create meaning together which will influence our future understanding and actions. I believe that it is important that members of the organisation become actively involved in meaningful meaning making processes to be able to give their best. Lang also writes that organisations work well when we give praise to people for what they do well. From this view I think that we also need to consider if our praise is genuine or taught, if it has become just one more model. It will be a huge difference if our praise as leaders arises from behaviouristic views and a method to acknowledge actions and skills we think is the best and right one or if we genuinely appreciate people, their unique contributions, potentials, being curious about their thoughts, experiences and dreams.

Lang writes further about the importance of exploring what it is that makes it possible for people to 'work well'. He highlights that it is important to provide contexts and opportunities for people to create success, pride, achievement and celebration in all part of life and business. He highlights from my view the importance of the leaders as context creators. As a leader and manager we have a position that makes it possible for us to invite to different contexts. Different contexts invite different meaning making processes and more or less constructive and creative conversations. From my view ideas of how we as leaders can create and support meaningful and fruitful contexts and conversations in our organisations will become one of the main success factors. The words we as leaders use when we invite will make a difference. How we create understandable and clear contexts, the focus for the context and conversations and the questions we ask will be decisive for how people understand themselves and the context. It will be critical for how they experience possibilities and experience pride in what they are doing and could do.

Lang highlights that this process involves people's emotions, people's passion and commitments. A successful process of change from this view gives space to bringing these aspects forth in language to create opening possibilities for the future. Lang says that this goes by different names and that some speak of it as systemic thinking, others speak of appreciative inquiry and others of relational responsibility. With this view we learn from what works best and let this learning guide our organisation's evolution.

Living the values of the people of the organisation requires changes in organisational patterns of life. Lang says that it succeeds when we create rituals and routines that help us to keep the focus on the future and to explore continuously what works well and what enriches or provides a sense of wonder in the organisation. Business and success from Lang's view is assured when members of the business actively enter into dialogue with each other, dialogue that ensures space for development, local achievement and local knowledge.

Lang also highlights that language creates the reality of the organisation; organisations and businesses are created, sustained and developed through the language and stories we create. Winning cultures are achieved through the practice of creating good stories and appreciative storytelling. My reflection is that the stories we tell influence the culture we create in organisations but the culture we develop will also influence our ability and possibility to tell different stories. If we feel and experience pride it will be easier to talk about pride. On the other hand if we carefully explore where we can find pride, maybe in unfamiliar places, we will through highlighting this pride strengthen this pride.

Leaders have a position that in high degree can influence and support development of an appreciative organisational culture, a culture which also can enable people to talk about and share pride. The words we use and stories we tell about ourselves, others and our organisations will direct our own and others' attention and it will influence our understanding, our wellbeing and ideas of what is possible.

To be a leader and manager gives us a very powerful position to influence. The way we as leaders express ourselves and live our values will make a huge difference to all members of the organisation. We can as leaders create contexts and space for co-creation,

collaboration, sharing and learning. When we invite everyone to become a part of co-creating the future we also will from my view invite success.

Learning and sense appears when I have an honest meeting with myself, my understanding and sense-making and appreciate myself and what I can learn from my journey. When I acknowledge that I have a lot of experience to learn but I might need to combine them in new ways. Learning appears when I trust myself but realise that my world is limited and become curious about what I can learn from others and my surroundings, when I acknowledge that others' understanding and life worlds are as important as mine and that others' life experiences can give more richness to my life and my leadership. When I realise that it is together we will become. (Kicki Oljemark, 2012)

Values in action

The importance of personal and professional development

When we, from a systemic and social constructionist perspective, acknowledge organisations as being socially constructed, this also from my view puts extra light on new ways and possibilities of highlighting the importance of leaders' personal and professional development. This view naturally invites development of self and profession in relation to the people involved in interactions within the context where the leader works and its surroundings.

The leader needs to find ways to lead him or her-self in the best way as well as developing the best way to lead others. Being a leader puts high demands on us and when we look upon the phenomenon of leadership as socially constructed and experienced by the beholder, leadership becomes even more complex. Nevertheless, I believe that it will also be in this complexity we will find infinite possibilities.

I don't believe that it is possible for any of us to fully understand ourselves. The idea to think that we could in full understand others and to understand what happens in our interactions is impossible. But even if we never will be able to understand in full, I believe that we as leaders in our mission need to aim at developing our understanding and also to support others in their meaning making processes.

When we challenge our own views, strive to adjust our earlier learning and transform our understanding and actions in ways that aim at contributing in the best way to serve the organisation and its members, we will also find unique possibilities to develop ourselves.

I believe that the more we curiously try to understand ourselves, others and our interactions; our genuine ethical leadership will be able to grow.

Not long ago we thought that the earth was the centre of universe and our understanding was centred towards the earth and ourselves. Now we know that we belong to a tiny part

of a galaxy, we have got more learning about our smallness. I believe that we as humans, as leaders but also our organisations can benefit from us exploring our own universe. To develop our awareness of what we as leaders act out from but also to pay attention to what is good about our universe so that we can enable these aspects to grow. If we pay attention to our own development, how we interact, communicate, are led by our emotions, our driving forces, values, goals, dreams, development areas and resources, I also believe that we will be able to find when we feel good about ourselves and interact with others in meaningful and helpful ways. This will not assume an isolated exploration to find answers; it aims at highlighting helpful learning that can support our ongoing development.

I believe that it is important for us as leaders to find a secure and relaxed position from which we can act and contribute in our best way to the co construction of organisational life. I believe that it will be easier to be able to be curious and explore other's universes if we feel comfortable with ourselves. It will also be easier to take well thought through actions and avoid being misled by emotions.

Many leaders participate in an organisation during a limited period of time. These visiting leaders could be seen as fellow travellers who have got the mission to lead in certain terrains or during a certain process in the life of the organisation. This situation will to a high degree invite consideration of valuing the history of the context but also a future which will be experienced as meaningful for the members of the organisation and their future. This position pays extra attention to being able to interact in respectful ways that invite members into a meaningful and sustainable co creation of the future of the organisation.

When we are on the journey of developing our leadership it will be important not to get stuck in a self-centred and limited view that is coloured by our own truths and beliefs. To develop a curiosity and strive towards whom we could become and who we would like others to become in relation to us helps us to keep the goal and how we can contribute in a particularly meaningful way. The possibilities there are and that we will experience will very much derive out of our own mind-set, and how we understand our self, others and interactions in this setting.

In order to be able to experience new things and see new possibilities it will be necessary to have a wish to look upon and challenge our own understanding, assumptions, emotions, reactions and interactions in the context we work.

With ourselves as more conscious partners in our own development of our personal leadership we will be able to make more conscious and well thought through thoughts and actions. How we understand ourselves and others will be a fundamental factor for how we will be able to influence our organisations to work optimally.

Leadership development becomes in my view a very sensitive and ethical matter. A journey of knowing myself and how I can interact in a good way will be a journey I need to travel by myself, to understand myself in the context and interactions I am involved in. But we can also as leaders have companionship from the rest of the members of the organisation if we invite them into reflecting on what would be meaningful and helpful for them and how they can support our leadership.

I think that it can be scary to look at ourselves; especially if we think that it is a question about right or wrong, if we think that what we find will be a question of fixed personality and if we have shame and blame as partners in our life. I believe that fixed ideas of what kind of personality I might be, qualities I have or not have, ideas of right, wrong and shame and blame limits our space for reflection and a positive growth as leaders. I truly believe that we can learn from our 'mistakes', if we acknowledge them as learning opportunities. If we are kind to ourselves and appreciate our own wish to learn we will grow.

If we look at leadership as an interactive process, each meeting will be unique and there cannot be one answer of how to execute our leadership. It is the uniqueness of each person that also opens up the possibilities and unique potentials that can grow in our interactions.

Leadership development today is business and a business that is driven by different concerns of the consultants and their companies. This is a market of selling and buying which also pays attention to what we are interested to buy. What we think we need as leaders is influenced by what the world around us tells us that we need. The question is also how comfortable we are as leaders to express that we need to understand ourselves in our leadership role and our interactions with others. Each leader's position, challenges and

possibilities will be unique dependent on their unique context and the people they interact with.

Our development areas are easily connected to defects and that we are not good enough. Maybe these aspects leads us into that we would like to show our good intentions by participating in courses that give us methods or tools that we can use. This allows us to keep our dignity at the same time as we show our good intention to become better leaders. But in what way will these courses support us to become the leader we would like to become and that will be helpful for the organisation? This is another question.

I believe that leadership consultants are very much responsible for the future we are co-creating by the way we influence leaders to focus on different concerns. But organisations and the top lead of the organisations also need to take a look at what kind of leadership they would like to be lived and what this leadership can contribute with. Another matter will also be the focus and approach at universities.

I believe that leadership development will be an important ethical question for the future. Personal development and to develop our unique personal leadership could be seen as a craftsmanship and a never ending process. This is a journey that I wish that each leader should be proud of.

How I live my leadership becomes crucial for the members of the organisation but also for my own wellbeing. Ethics lie in the heart of all human relationships and could from my view be seen as the very centre of leadership.

If we view leadership development as an important ethical matter the aspect of how I work as a researcher also will be a sensitive matter. Most of the participants expressed that they found the research question helpful. One also said that the questions might be even more helpful than his own answers. The process of putting words on, exploring and reflecting on their meanings could become an important and natural process in the act of leadership. Asking ourselves questions could also become a partner in personal and professional development. Questions can support us to reflect and move into reflexive processes.

The idea of the ethical reflexive compass that will follow described in a conceptual image will very much be supported by the idea of asking oneself questions.

Ethical leadership

Everyone will fight for his or her own right and meaning as long as she or he cannot imagine the greater meaning we can create together. (Kicki Oljemark, 2012)

If we view ethical leadership as relational, the aim of having values to guide us could support us to act in a way that harms other people as little as possible. But we can achieve more than this if we address the view of how we would like people to experience themselves and become in relation to us and also if we aim at influencing people to be able to give their best and be proud of what they are doing.

An ethical view from one person might not be ethical from another person's view and ethical actions might not be ethical or understood as ethical when it comes to the effects on others. This means that ethics will always be in the eyes of the beholder. We might have values that drive us as leaders but the way we live them might not be experienced as ethical by the people we interact with.

With an ethical leadership approach based on systemic constructionist views we are curious to understand ourselves and how we can use our self in the best way for the benefit of the organisation, its members and surroundings. We will have a desire to achieve efficiency beyond self-interest but not forget that it is not us who are doing this alone; we have important companions without whom we would not manage the mission. Ethical leadership reaches out for the resources and potential of the organisation and its members.

To be able to act ethically in relations, we consider that right and wrong is relative; we are not guardians of what is right or wrong. We need to understand that people have views that many times are much more helpful for them than ours and probably also better solutions than we have on their own problems. Our ethical leadership will be shown in our curiosity to understand the good intentions and resources people have. It will be a matter to support them to grow related to their mission based on what they value and the resources they have.

I believe that most leaders are value driven in different ways. But if we are in a hurry to implement the values we find most important, there is always a risk that we forget that others also have values that they are concerned about. It is easy to forget that to anchor values people need to make them their own. It is also easy to put words on a wall and to forget that how we understand and live values could be different. Individual values that more or less consciously guide people in organisations, live alongside with the values we would like them to incorporate.

An ethical leadership invites us to view aspects of development and how good can get better. Sometimes we might need to do things that could be experienced by others as unethical. Our ethics as leaders will not always be understood by others and like all words and actions how we show ethics show a generalised picture. If we reflect we will be able to consider different aspects of values we would like to live, how they could be experienced and what we would like to achieve with our ethical leadership.

We humans are many times governed by our emotions and things we value can have strong emotional connections. If we as leaders are curious about and become more conscious of our own driving forces and about what motivates us, it also creates a possibility to plan our actions with the end in view, to imagine what I would like to achieve and to be a part of. Self-awareness helps us to lead ourselves and our emotions in an ethical way and to be able to approach others with more thoughtfulness. If we share well thought through reasoning, it will be easier for others to trust us even though they might not agree.

In the role of being a leader we need to be both ethical and effective; this doesn't need to be an opposition but it needs well thought through thoughts and actions. As a leader you have a lot of demands and you often need to combine these demands, stressful situations and economic issues with relational processes. To work as a leader involves being in constant relationship with others and to have responsibility over others. Leadership invites us to find a connection between efficiency, the best for the organisation, its goals and for the members of the organisation in ethical ways.

I believe that if we get to know our own and other people's good intentions and values, we also can find bridges and links to the mission and values of the organisation. It is not just us who can be guided by values. If we explore the values we would like to live in our

organisation together, these are also values that can guide people of the organisation and they have the possibility to develop themselves in the similar way in relation to their task and the people they meet. This will also be an important part of developing an organisational culture where everyone has a sense of coherence and feels important as contributors to the whole.

From my view, ethical leadership and its possibilities will be shown both as lived in the moment and its long term consequences. I believe that small ethical matters often make a huge difference.

People in organisations are involved in never ending meaning-making processes. What we value and what motivates us could differ a lot. To be able to lead an organisation in the best way we will be helped by if people's driving forces are related to their task, mission and common values. Everyone should have the possibility to be proud.

When we have a common dream that we share of what values we would like to live in our organisation, this gives meaning and belonging. To have a co-created image of what we would like to create and how we would like it to be experienced by ourselves and others makes people proud of their contribution and the potential they have, this also leads to a wish to make this come true. To lead the exploration of what values we would like to live in our organisation and what could be is from my view important leadership actions. The values we live in an organisation will be shown in the conversations we have, stories that are told and actions that are made.

Ethical leadership from my view is connected to the appreciative approach. Leaders can through living appreciatively spread a hopeful and appreciative atmosphere and create appreciative cultures. But we need to be aware that an appreciative approach could also end up being just a method and even with good intentions, just become one more model or quick fix that will not genuinely reach out to people.

To live a leadership that allows different voices and that also allows different feelings is also from my view an important ethical matter. An appreciative approach then becomes a trust in that people have some kind of logic in what they are doing and there is also something they cherish. Appreciative ethical leadership acknowledges that all people are resourceful

with a lot of potential that we can seek for in the past, in the present and in the future. The appreciative approach looks for value in the things people cherish.

A value based organisation could be seen as an organisation where the people of the organisation to a high degree live their own and the organisation's values smoothly side by side. It will be shown in relations, interactions and communication, by the stories that are told and in conversations between people. It is important that the leader invites everyone to work with, reflect on and talk about value based aspects, continuously.

A value based organisation is dependent on a leader who is genuine in his or her wish to contribute to the best for everyone involved and to the long term of the organisation, a leader who has a genuine interest in creating and supporting context where people can use their resources in their best way.

One ethical aspect with leadership that I have come to think a lot about is the importance of honouring the past in relation to both individuals and groups. It is easy to be future oriented or to focus on the present but how often do we pay attention to the past, resources that have been shown and what people have valued? When I arrive as new manager, it is easy to forget to be curious about the past. It is also easy to forget that I often have limited understanding of what others value about the past when I have been working for a while. I might think that others think like me. I get the picture of a tree in my mind and how important the roots are. The roots are necessary and need soil to enable the tree but also the roots to grow for the future.

We live in constant change and organisations have to adapt to the change they are living in on a daily basis. Each meeting and all the work we are doing in organisations are to a high degree future oriented toward the survival of the organisation and focused on achieving the mission and certain tasks. It is natural to pay attention toward the future and how we can meet this in the best way. My experience is that by valuing the past we will increase the strengths of the roots that make us become proud and stand strong when we enter into the future and toward change. When we value the past, we honour people's earlier experiences and knowledge. When we honour the past we create a context where people, individuals and groups are acknowledged as important and we show that the things they have done have been important and made a difference. By honouring the past we also can

explore and recognise skills and resources that have been shown and that could be useful in building the future.

I believe that when people experience and come to know that they are important, that they have resources, their self-esteem and professional pride will grow and they will also to a higher degree take responsibility for the future and be able to change. By revisiting earlier resources and skills it is possible to bridge over toward the desirable future.

To honour the present is also important; things we experience work well and that give life to organisations but also what people value, people's good intentions and what it is that motivates people and give meaning.

The powerful images the future contributes with are possible pictures and understandings that are not yet set. The past and what has been working well will be something we can bring with us on our journey.

The appreciative view related to ethics invites all the potential, skills, knowledge and wisdom that can be found in organisations, within individuals and groups. There is an infinite source of resources that are possible to be released. To be a leader from the view of an appreciative systemic perspective includes a myriad of possibilities!

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the spring of hope. Charles Dickens (1859)

The ethical domain of leadership

On my journey to express and explore ethical issues and how they can be related to leadership and organisations I have found one article especially helpful. I have been inspired by Lang, Little and Cronen's interpretation (1990) of Maturana and Varela's (1987) ideas about domains.

The authors write that the various activities that human relations professionals carry out can be viewed as integral elements in the building up, transforming and maintaining of our societies and communities. The authors point out that Maturana thought of domains and

distinguished human acts in language as taking place in three different domains. They call these the domains of Production, Explanation and Aesthetics. The authors write that Maturana and Varela (1987) maintain that we exist in these three domains simultaneously but also that these are not the only domains in which we exist. We could be said to exist in myriads of domains.

The domain of Production may be seen as that frame in which we conceive the world in objective terms. In the domain of production objectivity exists and we behave according to our understanding of that objectivity. Thus the domain of production is the domain of established truth or in Maturana's terms the world of a Universe – one singular version of the truth.

The domain of Explanation is the domain of questions and questioning. Here objectivity is placed in parentheses, to indicate a multi-verse or many versions of reality, rather than a uni-verse. This multi-verse is brought forth through the eye of an observer in co-ordinations of actions with other observers, such that all realities or perspectives are equally valid though not necessarily equally desirable.

The domain of Aesthetics refers to the 'emotion in the happening of living you recognise as aesthetics.' Thus this refers to such notions as elegance, beauty, harmony, desirability, consistency, morality and ethics. The aesthetic domain is described as a frame which relates both to the domain of production and to the domain of explanation (Lang, Little & Cronen, 1990).

I have thought a lot about the authors' description and I would like to play a little with the idea in a way that has been helpful for me and that I hope will be helpful for other leaders.

The idea of the domains contributes with a way that I find useful when we look at organisations and leadership. There are certain facts or 'truths' represented by the production domain which leaders and the rest of the organisation have to relate to. This could be referred to as, for example, the mission, organisational goals, economical prerequisites and other facts that are established in the organisation and that cannot be disregarded.

The domain of explanation is to live in a domain of no truth. For me it became confusing how to separate the domain of aesthetics and the domain of explanation because I think that the world of no truth is one part of the aesthetics.

The aesthetic domain and the elegance and beauty that are referred to in the article could also be referred to how leaders operate their tasks and mission, how they through their practice approach people and situations with grace and in an aesthetic way. There are always choices to make and even difficult tasks can be done with elegance and grace. In this sense I would like to suggest that elegance and grace could be noticed in many ways and often lie in small details and in the craftsmanship of leadership. One important thing in the aesthetic domain from my view is to pay attention to how we communicate. What words we use and how we by the use of our words and the questions we ask can invite people into different understandings, conversations and actions. But also how we become through the words we use. What dialogues are we inviting ourselves and people in our organisation into?

We have many reasons to pay attention to the words and how they are experienced by others, how we position others in the way we use different words and how people understand themselves and their context from the words we and they use. If we are stuck in old patterns, which all of us are to greater or lesser degree, a way to challenge our way of communicating is to revisit our domain of aesthetics. To revisit the domain of aesthetics also enables us to think about; what is it we would like to achieve, contribute with? What difference do we want the people involved to experience?

The aesthetic domain could be seen as the domain where people are invited into the power of co-creation and collaboration. This domain also highlights the relational aspect of leadership and to lead, that people are in a constant relational processes.

But I miss something in this description and I would like to add one domain, the ethical domain; the origins of whom we are and want to become in our leadership. The awareness of the ethical domain influences how we work with the production domain and this will be shown in the aesthetic domain and in our aesthetical leadership. This domain could be seen as the domain where our values can be explored and they will live in the aesthetical

domain. By separating ethics from aesthetics my hope is to create more awareness of what and how, to find the possibilities within exploring the different domains.

I have experienced that many leaders have felt the burden from the production domain, a burden of what they need to do and the frames and limitations they experience they have. I know that there could be many things that are connected to the position of being a manager that are difficult and that there are stressful factors and a huge pressure on many managers today. But even so, I believe that there is a huge unexplored field and an ocean of manoeuvring space, even in situations we experience as very limited. I believe that if I can give myself as a leader time to reflect, and space to look for what is important, I will find possibilities. Maybe I need someone that helps me to sort things out, to put the production domain in less focus. Maybe it could be helpful with someone who supports me with questions but I will be able to find a lot of answers within myself. Creativity could be simply that I adjust and combine old experiences in new ways.

The ethical domain will honour the importance of acknowledging values you would like to live and looking at who you would like to be and what you would like to achieve with your actions. What are the consequences of your actions that you would be proud of? This domain could be seen as a lens through which leaders could look at their mission and the production domain. This domain offers us a background of beliefs, ideas and understandings that will be able to contribute to the way our aesthetic leadership will be shown.

The picture below illustrates how I have found that if we explore our values and also company values we can have them as guides when we move into the production domain and how we do things. The HOW will then be shown in the aesthetics. It also aims at illustrating the manoeuvring space we often have in the small things we do, how we interact, communicate with others. Solid values would from this view increase action space shown in the aesthetics, where we will find our lived values.

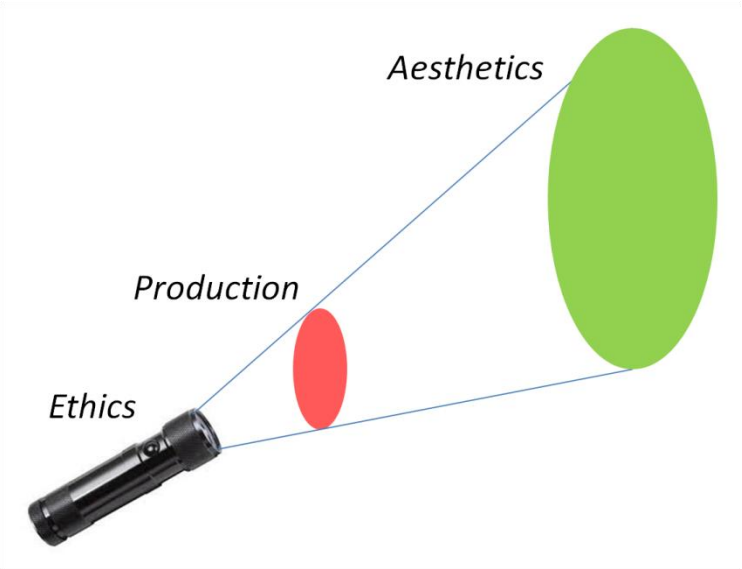


Figure 5 - Leadership Possibilities

Ethical relational compass

Background – A derived ethical direction

Ethical leadership from my view benefits from being guided by values. A value based leadership supports us to find our inner core which also will support us to handle complex situations in a good way.

The position of being a manager and leader invites us to constant interactions with others. Values we have can easily be 'forgotten' or hidden by patterns that we have entered or 'relational dances' that we have been invited into. What we do and how people experience what we do are translated through different relational and communicative processes. Our personal inner core of values can be shadowed but it can always be revisited again. When we light up our values and brush off the dust we also will experience new things.

Today, short term aspects might influence leaders to make short term decisions but I am convinced that long term aspects of a company/organisation will enable us to reach the overall goals much easier and also faster. The way we act creates understanding and belonging that will reach far into the future. It is easy to forget that seeds we plant for the future are important for the organisation's sustainability but also ability to change.

To put the future in sight, when you as leader don't know if you will be there when it is reached, is a huge challenge. We all want to be important and contribute, and short term goals can show that we have done a good job in the moment. But if we as leaders can imagine what we are a part of constructing, if we can visualise a future that we would be proud of, that we have contributed to, I believe that our wish to contribute long term also can grow stronger. I also believe that this is the same with the rest of the members of the organisation. We all can benefit and be proud of when we find our ethical direction.

Despite many seemingly important and big ethical questions, ethical concerns and their possibilities in organisations, from my view, have their main contribution in the everyday meeting between people, between the leader and his or her employees and the people they meet. There will always be challenges and difficulties but as leaders we have the

possibility to create space to think about and reflect upon how we can deal with situations in the best possible way. How we are and how we approach others as leaders will make a difference if a person could leave a conversation with us with dignity, and feel resourceful and appreciated. The conversations we invite to or join will influence people's motivation. As leaders, which also the research pointed out, we are important role models to live the culture we would like to be lived.

A manager and leader have the overall responsibility for the organisation or the unit. This also means from my view that leaders also need to lead with a greater understanding of employees and interactions than we can expect employees to have. But there are also ethical challenges in the authority and the power that a leader possesses that we should remember. Through this position we possess power over others and to a greater extent than others have. Through leadership we have influence over other people's possibilities in the organisation. This means that leaders' actions probably will have more effect and will be experienced and noticed much more intensively than other people's actions. As leaders we have everyone's eyes on us. Even appreciative approaches and feedback could be sensitive from the view of power, how we use it, the aim why we use it and if we have a balance in our approach that makes everyone feel important.

I have found that the leaders that participated in the interviews gave a comfortable impression and also showed pride when they spoke about values they valued. But in what degree they had thought about how they could live these values and how their ethical direction was experienced and could be experienced by others they did not mention, and I did not explore this further. This is also learning I have got from my own leadership journey. I had a lot of values that I experienced as important in my leadership. But the extent, to which I reflected upon how they could be experienced by others and helpful for them, was limited. This research journey has given me a wonderful opportunity to explore my values, to unfold them and to reflect on how I would like them to be experienced and valued by others in our interactions.

The lack of discussions about leadership and how values might be shown is also something I experience in my work as a consultant. It is common in Sweden that organisations or a leading group in an organisation name values that are desirable to be lived. Value words are expressed that should guide everyone. How these values could be experienced in

different ways, lived and experienced by others is from my view a source for enormous development related to organisational cultures and possibilities. I have found a huge absence of these discussions. I have also found an absence of these discussions in literature. Ethics are often discussed as moral principles of right or wrong. Systemic views and appreciative inquiry live from my view values but these are not usually highlighted and discussed as values. There is always a risk that the creative and appreciative methods that have been developed and with high certainty based on the authors' values become superficial methods if the beholders do not reflect on how come and how these methods could be experienced and valued by others. How come we do like we do? What are the values we would like to live? What is it we would like to achieve with these values? How can we achieve this through approach and methods?

I would like to contribute to this exploration by focusing on leadership and lived values through a conceptualising of the ethical relational compass. The beginning will be to explore the landscape and background of the compass.

Landscape and background of the compass

The goal would naturally be if we as leaders genuinely in every situation could live our values. But in the life of organisations we always will meet more or less challenging situations and interactions. We will end up in situations where we will be more or less comfortable. Things and circumstances will arise that challenge us, our emotions, and our relationship with others, situations that to high degree will invite us to reflect on how we can act in an ethical way and genuinely live our values.

When we enter into a leadership role, it will invite us to a never ending learning process. This really could be a wonderful opportunity to start exploring our inner core, what we value and how these values connect to values of the organisations. This could all be supportive to the organisation and its members. It could also be a wonderful opportunity to reflect on how we would like to live our values.

But we need to make an important distinction here. The start would be to explore or reconnect with our own core values. But to enable our core values to be helpful in the

leadership role, we need to transform them into meaningfulness for the organisation and its members. We need to translate how what we value can be experienced as ethical and helpful to others. This will not be a matter of approaching others in the similar way we would like to be approached ourselves. It will be a matter of how we can live our values in a way that will be experienced in a helpful way by others based on their understandings, worldview and needs.

To be able to do this we need to have a view of the landscape we move into, its members and their history, present and future dreams.

To start our leadership with thoughtfulness and time to curiously explore what is already there, what is working well and what people are proud of should from my view be put high on each leader's agenda. But I also think that it should be put on each leader's agenda to reflect on our possible contribution, core values and how we can live values that are helpful for others.

To get a picture of where we are in our personal leadership process, we also can benefit from reflecting on where we came from and what we have learned from earlier experiences, experiences that influence how we look at leadership. This knowledge could be helpful in the way that we will become more aware of our history and how it can influence and influences our understanding, values and actions today. We will to a higher degree be able to transform earlier experiences into meaningfulness in our new role and in a meaningful way for this particular organisation and its members.

When we view leadership as relational this will also invite us to learn from the relationships and interactions we have. If we reflect on our own thoughts, assumptions, emotions and actions, on how we influence and are influenced by others we will be able to learn more about how we can develop meaningful and good interactions. To involve people we interact with in our learning also by asking them of their understanding and how they understand us and how we can be helpful for them as leaders would also from this view be natural.

By this reflecting and reflexive process we will also be able to transform experiences into consciousness and helpful learning from situations when we lived a leadership that we and

others found helpful and genuinely based on values. And we will be able to create visions of what it can look like for the future, visions that can guide us. But these visions will not be set in stone because our leadership needs to take each unique context and relationship into account.

My hope is that the conceptual idea of an ethical relational compass will support leaders with a reflective tool to support them in their development of their personal and ethical leadership.

The ethical compass aims at supporting leaders to lead themselves and others in a genuine and sustainable way based on values. The idea of the compass aims at highlighting the importance but also the possibilities we have with our leadership by reflexive practice, exploring values and strengthened value based actions.

Value based actions supported by the idea of a compass will be able to in a natural way take advantage of and strengthen skills, resources and potential of both leaders and the rest of the organisation.

The idea of the compass can in its origins be used in two ways:

- **Leadership relational ethical compass -** a reflexive guide for leaders to support development of their abilities to reflect and act in a confident way and out of a value based leadership, to develop their ethical leadership.

- **Organisational relational ethical compass** - a tool for leaders to co create a value-based culture with the rest of the members in the organisation.

Leadership relational ethical compass

Introduction and aim

The aim of the leadership relational compass is to

- Support leaders to increase their abilities and confidence to lead based on core values.

- Develop a meaningful, sustainable personal and ethical leadership which aims at supporting the organisation and its members to use their resources in a good way and move towards their potential.
- Provide a reflective tool which enables leaders to explore values and their meanings but also to encourage them to take actions in relationship to these values.

The idea of the leadership relational ethical compass pays particular attention to how I as a leader can be guided in my leadership. How leaders can be guided in a way that invites constant reflections, new learning and growth. This includes exploring one's own values, values I would like to live as a leader, but with the main focus on how these values could be meaningful and helpful for the people I interact with so that they in their turn can be helpful to the organisation and its mission.

The compass invites a possibility for me as a leader to develop my way of living my values in a way that members of the organisation and collaborators would benefit from. This also allows me as a leader to find and strengthen my inner core and pride in the way that my leadership will be able to find new meaning based on meaningful and helpful collaboration and support to others.

I believe that it is important for leaders just as all other professions to have meaning in what we do and to be able to be proud of what we are doing. To find pride that is not only related to how productive we are, how we manage production and how think in economic terms. Instead I would like to pay attention to pride that is related to our own ability to develop ourselves and interact in a meaningful and helpful way with others, our contribution to support the organisation to work optimally, the whole and its part, individuals as well as groups.

The compass aims at inviting a reflecting mind and reflexive processes where we will learn as leaders in relation to and from interactions with others and their responses. It aims at inviting and supporting never ending learning.

With the compass in our mind I want to invite leaders to look at the organisation and its members with eyes of wonder and with an appreciative and curious mind. The aspects of

what we can do together, the potential of “us” while we live our organisational and personal values side by side will be crucial.

The leadership relational compass pays particular attention to relational and dialogical aspects within our interactions as leaders and how we can develop relational aspects and our interactions with the rest of the members of the organisation.

It is easy to at this stage think that what if we just support leaders to learn all the universally good things we have learned about what it is that will make a difference. What if all leaders come to know how much an appreciative approach and co creation will make a difference. But my strong belief is that we need to make all this understanding to our own learning journey. We need to support leaders to reflect on and experience by themselves what it is that will make a difference. To support leaders to do something different that will give new experiences and learning. I have met many wonderful leaders who for example talk about showing appreciation and the importance of co creation but I do not think they have experienced yet that there is a galaxy and myriads of possible ways and possibilities.

A reflexive tool when challenges appear

The compass focuses on how we can guide ourselves in a situation or interaction that is particularly challenging. We can use the metaphor of orientating in a landscape where we have lost sight of where we are or where we are heading, or a landscape that is challenging and exhausting to move through towards the future. We might even experience to be stuck and have difficulties to move on.

To make it easier to understand the idea, I will illustrate this by showing an example. As with every example and attempt of formalising a complex and living process, there is a risk that it is simplified and concretised compared to real life and every unique situation that we will face. Nevertheless, I hope it will be helpful for its purpose.

The process includes four steps or areas that are cared for in sequence as a preparation for facing the 'challenge' in a constructive and ethically supportive way.

1. Challenge
2. Ethical goal
3. Valued experiences in the eye of the beholder
4. Leader's values in action

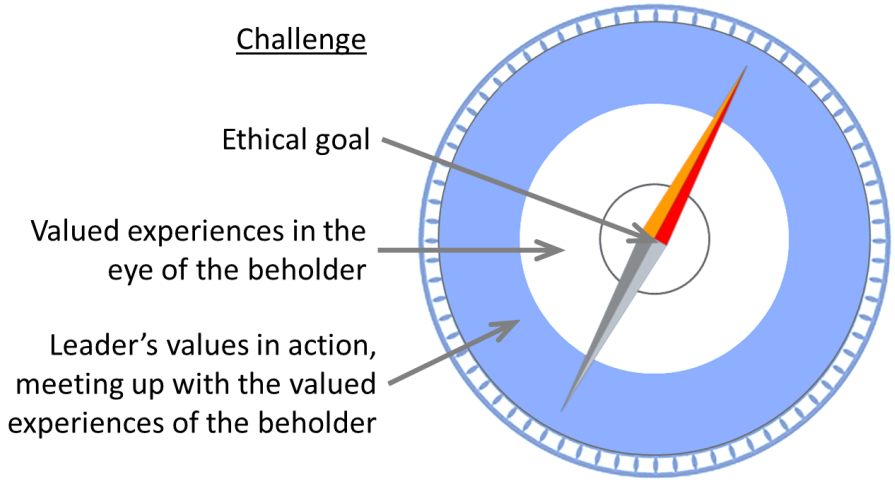


Figure 6 - Steps and areas of the relational ethical compass

A short example (further details below): the Challenge could be to dismiss a person; the Ethical goal could be to do this in a respectful way. The question is then what experiences could be valued by the beholder (the person being dismissed). These valued experiences could for instance be being heard, feeling dignity, feeling safe, clarity as shown in the white circle in the figure below. The next question is what the leader can do to give the other person these valued experiences. For each valued experience, there is a set of actions shown in the blue circle in the figure below.

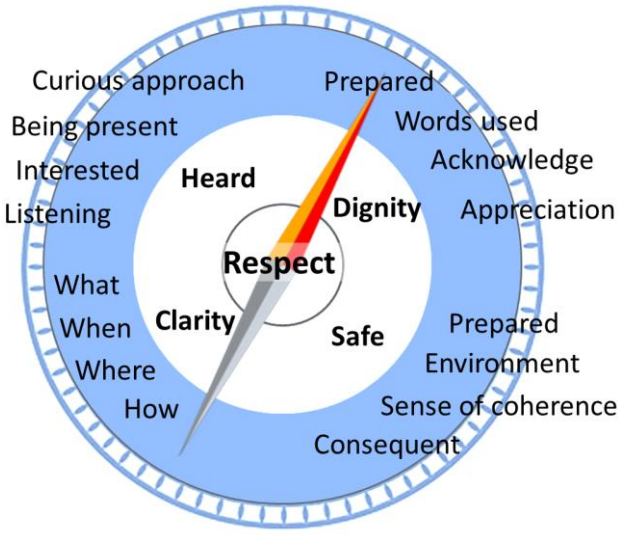


Figure 7 - Relational ethical compass filled in from a sample unfolding process

Challenge

The first step of the compass will be to focus on the "challenge". To identify the challenging situation, the patterns or the relationships we need to develop. It will also be important to consider what the organisation, I as a leader and the person involved could benefit from if this interaction develops and will be connected to ethical issues.

When we have identified the position and what we could achieve the next step would be to explore and identify values we would like to live and that could be helpful and give meaning to process. These ethical goals would be considered as something we as leaders would like to be proud of if we have taken into account in the situation.

Ethical goal

The next step is to reflect on the **ethical goal** and what I would like to achieve with the ethical goal I have brought into attention.

To do this we need to reflect on what values we would like the person or people we are going to meet to experience lived in our leadership and how we want him, her or them to

experience themselves based on the interaction and meeting with us, this will in turn give us the "**Value focus"**

Example (depicted in the sample above)

Challenge – to dismiss a person

Ethical goal – to do this in a way that enables him or her to feel respected

Valued experiences – What will make a difference so that he or she will feel respected? The valued experiences will invite an unfolding process of the ethical goal.

Unfolding process, identify values in action

The unfolding process could involve many possible values lived when we turn into actions. This step aims at inviting leaders to unfold and explore the content of the values they express. To start this process it could be good to acknowledge aspects we are proud of and that we think show this ethical direction. What experiences do we have about when as leaders we have lived a respectful leadership and how this could look like?

Values in action

Take into account what I can think about and actions that can guide me as a leader

Being present – possible lived actions invited

What will enable me to be present and be experienced by the other as being present?

How can I prepare so that I will be able to be present?

How can I be present in the meeting? How can this be experienced?

Examples of values in actions connected to being present: what can the invitation look like to set the best scene? That I am relaxed when I come to the meeting, think about what meetings I will have before and afterwards that allows me to be present, to be calm, what

enables me to be calm? How can I prepare myself? Be prepared to listen and acknowledge the other person's views and understanding, being there for the other person, clarity to enable understanding and enable presence also for the other person. Ask the person involved about what will be important for them in this meeting so that he or she experiences that it has been a for them a respectful meeting?

If I as a leader have difficulties to know different ways to do this it could be helpful to revisit if I have experienced something similar and what this looked like and then reflect on how this could be applied to this particular situation. I also believe that it will be helpful for leaders in the future to have conversational partners who are not involved in the particular context, to be able to work with this development process. This could preferably be another manager. I also believe that when we reflect in groups and share thoughts and experiences we will grow. This might be particularly important for leaders because leaders are often alone in their role.

The unfolding process that aims at supporting us as leaders to move into values in action could be developed in many steps. Sometimes one particular part could benefit from being paid extra attention. If we as leaders think about what would be the most important contribution I could do for the other person from his or her view, this could give us a lead to what will be the most important issue to develop.

Connection to metaethics

Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy (2012) writes that Metaethics explores the connection between values, reasons for action, and human motivation. It asks for how moral standards might provide us with reasons to do or refrain from doing. It also addresses many of the issues commonly bound up with the nature of freedom.

Meta ethics is described as the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological, presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice. As such, it counts within its domain a broad range of questions and puzzles including questions like: Is morality more a matter of taste than truth? How do we learn about the moral facts, if there are any? These questions have lead naturally to puzzles

about the meaning of moral claims as well as about moral truth and the justification of our moral commitments.

The metaphor of the compass will not give us one right answer. The ethical relational compass aims at inviting us into asking ourselves as leaders more questions. The metaphor addresses metaethical questions and reasoning. This highlights aspects of how values and practice could be seen as interconnected and how we through reasoning and reflections can support our leadership to emerge related to the need of the organisation and its members.

When we come to understand what we as human beings value, it could from my view become easier to also explore values we have that can be valuable for people we interact with and the organisation. When we know our values we can reflect on how others might want to experience these values based on their world view, positions and experiences.

I believe that by understanding and develop our own values as humans and leaders connected to how these aspects can be valuable for others from their view we can become more grounded in our leadership. We can develop our leadership based on serving both the organisation and the members of the organisation in the best way.

By being aware of the importance of asking ourselves as leaders questions and reflect on the outcome of our interactions we will be able to be more grounded and genuine in the values we would like to live and get more successful outcome in the way we will be experienced as genuine and good by others.

Copp (2007) writes about the idea of autonomous agency. He is reasoning about the idea that by being autonomous also pay attention to be self-governing which will mean to do well in governing one-self. I would like to connect this to aspects of the importance of leader's personal development, to be grounded and not lead by irrational emotions. Copp says that a person's values are a part of his or her identity or her self-esteem identity. This also pays attention to view actions governed by ones values as self-governed.

I would like to connect Copp's thoughts to the idea of the ethical relational compass, and by this also invite metaethical aspects into leadership conversations. From my view this will

lead us towards how leaders can grow in their leadership and as persons by being grounded in their values. Leadership development then becomes a matter of how leaders can develop their ability to serve others through their grounded values in a way that also will be experienced as valuable for people they interact with. This in its turn pay attention to what values that will make a difference when we interact with others. Value based actions that will enable people in organisations to feel good about them-selves and to become able to give their best.

If leaders can governing themselves in a good way and live their values in a valuable way for others subjective experience they would from my view live have an ethical leadership.

Copp writes about how people when they become able to governing one self and how this will create a greater range of options in the future, or the sorts of opportunities one wants to have. From this view we can also address the importance of being grounded as a leader and connect these aspects to actionspace as leaders. Our aesthetical domain and HOW we do things will emerge through reasoning and reflections based on value and metaethical reasoning and questions.

Divergent thinking

Meta ethics and a reflexive and reflecting approach such as the idea of the ethical compass could also be connected to divergent thinking. I find these aspects and leaders ability to think creative very interesting to how leaders make sense and what possibilities they see.

If leaders develop their reflective, reflexive and divergent abilities their abilities to see different ways, different aspects and solutions also would be developed.

Runko (1991) refer to research within divergent thinking as an important component of creative thinking. McCrae (1987) writes that divergent thinking has been generally correlated with openness and with the personalites domain of openness to experience. The openness to experience from my view highlights to as leaders look for responses we get from others, how others might experience what we say or do. It also from my view highlights the openness of different views as a resource to build the optimal organisation and to appreciate everyones contribution. If we can think creative about how we can use

ourselves and hpw others can grow in their profession to use them self in the best way we will optimise peoples potential and reach out for the optimal organisation. The optimal organisation from this view would be an organisation where creativity would be a natural part of development as well as convergent thinking.

Divergent thinking would as well as the meta ethics invite us into asking questions

Summary

I believe that all of us have good intentions but they sometimes arrive in strange and less constructive packages. It is also easy to lose sight when we become involved in our own and other people's emotions. Our good intention and the dream of what could be could make us end up driven by emotions that become contraindicated to what we wanted to achieve.

Our leadership relational compass can support us to find appreciative ways to unpack the values we bring with us and develop our understanding of how they can be helpful to the organisation and its members. We have a lot to explore behind the first sight.

The unfolding process that belongs to the relational ethical compass will give us a possibility to reach out for the ocean of meaning and possibilities we can find when we invite ourselves into reflective processes, processes that also invite us to unfold wisdom that behind the first sight. This process also invites us to develop our divergent abilities.

The unfolding process and the arrival in the possible values in action will give us as leaders developed action space and will increase possibilities we will see but also possible actions.

Your own choice how to move on and who you would like to be and how you would like to live your values will be a life journey. It is important to find your own passion, energy and engagement; this will enable you to develop your own personal touch and tone. This is something we need to work on our whole life and there is no right or wrong answer.

"I might be led by things I desire. I might be led by fear. My emotions might lead me in one direction and the sense I make to despair. I might stumble and fall, I might change my directions and I might lose sight. But deep inside I know that I have a sense of what it is that

is 'right'. Deep inside I have a secret gift from life, a gift that guides my humanity; values that I keep close to my heart. To reach out I need to reach inside and catch seeds I would like to plant and garden for the future. If I look carefully I will find values that can guide me toward what we could become when I become" (Kicki Oljemark, 2012).

Organisational relational ethical compass

Introduction

Within the socially constructed organisation we acknowledge that it is not possible to fully control the process and we cannot know exactly where we will end up. But we still need to have a direction and a goal for all members to move our energy towards, we have a mission and this needs to be clear.

How well we will succeed with our mission will be dependent on how all members are able to use their resources in their best way and appreciate what they are doing. The sense of coherence will make a difference to everyone involved.

Our mission is related to our organisation's surroundings. We have clients and customers who are dependent on us and on that everyone in the organisation enjoys what they are doing and gives their best. In many cases they also can make a choice if they would like to collaborate with us and use our services. We need to justify our work and what we do and find ways to give our best. It will be influential how customers and clients experience us and also themselves in relationship to us, this will be dependent on our service and how we interact with them. Organisations' lived culture could be seen as the organisations' lived values. The position of being a manager and leader will give us a unique position from which we can support development and growth of organisational culture.

I believe that if people experience that they are important and feel appreciated this will make a huge difference. But I believe that meaning will grow and pride will be able to develop if we experience that what we do is meaningful and that we can live our values, if we experience a sense of coherence. It will be important if we can be proud together of what will be the "we" we belong to.

I believe that if we as leaders support members of our organisation to find ways to work based on values and support for a sense of coherence, they will develop their engagement, passion and responsibility for the task; they will be able to give their best. To develop this all members of the organisation can benefit from being guided by values.

There are potentially huge benefits from involving the whole organisation and its members to work with the organisational relational ethical compass as a reflective tool. With everyone involved there will be diversity in how values in actions can be noticed and experienced. This will support each member and the whole organisation to get a multitude of understanding, to grow and develop meaningful actions and interactions for the future.

Organisational missions and activities often involve people who are dependent on us in different ways, customers, clients, patients, children, teenagers and all members of our society. To set the scene for the organisational relational ethical compass we need to be aware of both our organisational setting but also in what ways people are involved in interactions and are dependent on us and our organisation in different ways.

Organisational landscape and its surroundings

If we look at our organisational context like a metaphor of a landscape we as leaders need to orientate ourselves within this landscape. To illustrate this landscape as a map could be helpful to imagine, where we are, where we came from and where we are heading.

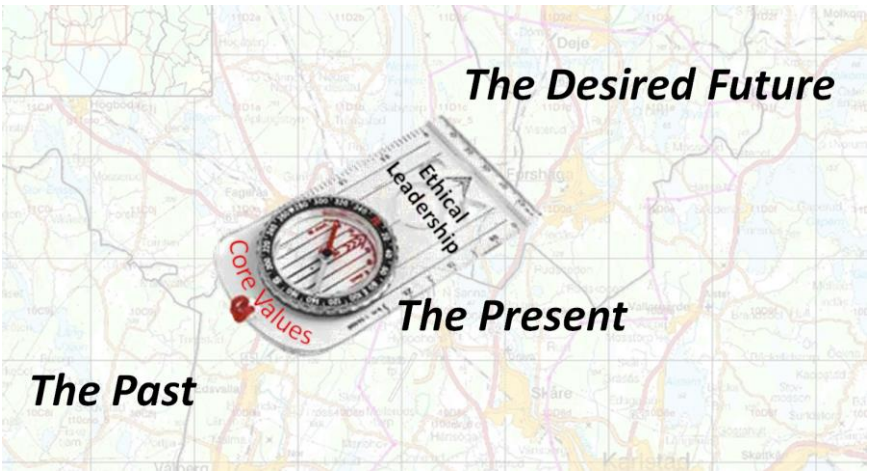


Figure 8 - Navigating toward the desired future

To understand the landscape and the map it can be helpful to look at our organisation with eyes of wonder and with a genuine “not knowing” curiosity, avoiding pre assumptions.

With the image of a map this also reminds us to look at what landscape surrounds this organisation.

We need to be curious as leaders and the organisational exploration ought to involve each member’s understanding and how they create meaning. To give dignity to the process it is important to involve pride and what has been working well.

The process will be similar to the leadership relational compass.

It is a good thing in the start of the process to remind everyone of the mission and overall goals of the organisation; this can be a starting point and visualises the organisational direction.

The leader will be the facilitator of the process. To have the leader of the organisation as the leader of the process would from my view give many benefits such as

- The leader will get the opportunity to lead in an ethical way, show their own values in action by the way the process will be led.
- He or she will also be able to listen to the knowledge in the organisation and get more wisdom of how this knowledge and values members would like to live by can be led successfully forward.

The process of the organisational relational compass

The starting point would be an identified challenge or a development field. This “request” for development could for example come from responses by clients or customers, the surrounding of the organisation, from the organisation’s members or the leader. The focus will be related to ethical matters, quality of work and its delivery.

In this process all the members of the organisation that are involved in the matter will be invited to participate.

As well as the leader’s relational ethical compass the “challenge” or goal will be reformulated into an ethical direction.

Exploration will be done of what is already working well related to this ethical direction. Values in actions that people are proud of. Then the unfolding process will start.

The main focus of the process will be:

- What will be important in relation to others?
- How would we like our customers and people dependent on our organisation to experience our organisation and us?
- What will make a difference for them based on their interactions with us?
- What values would we like them to experience?
- What values are already lived and in what ways?
- What are we particularly appreciated for?
- How can we develop the way we live our values?

This exploration enables us to value, build on and strengthen resources already there to be found as well as develop awareness of the importance of lived values during the unfolding process.

It will make a difference to members of the organisation if leaders show interest and appreciation in relation to what has been and what is but also in relation to dreams of what could be. With a curious and appreciative mind we will also be able to create dignity especially when change is needed and when people might not experience that what they have been doing has been appreciated earlier. It might have been criticism in relation to what has been done.

Below you will find one possible example of how the organisational relational ethical compass could be used in a process:

Dilemma: In elder care. The leader had got complaints by an old woman that she experienced the people working in the elder care as not caring for her. When she was asked how come she experienced this she said; - They never take time to care about me and they do not even take off their jackets when they come into my home.

A leader who would use the organisational relational ethical compass as a guide would invite members of the organisation into a development meeting. How this preferably had been done could have been supported by using their own Leadership relational ethical compass.

In the meeting the leader would invite the group into a process that could look like follows:

"I would like to invite you to a meeting for us to share experiences and knowledge of how we can develop our care for the elder people we meet. The focus for the meeting will be on our experiences and knowledge of what will make the difference in the meeting with us and what we would like the older person to experience in the meeting with us."

Taking out the ethical direction

This could for example end up in like the example above – being met by respect.

The unfolding process will explore what values will be included in a respectful "meeting" and what the elder would value in our approach related to being respectful met.

The next step is to explore and think about how it is possible to meet these valued aspects. What will make a difference?

With the process the leader can guide the employees through how the values they will unfold will be able to be lived, shown and experienced.

The leader can support the process by contributing with specific important moments that could be related to the visit and ask questions like: How will this be shown when you arrive, what would the elder value and experience as respectful when you arrive? What can you do to enable these aspects and experience?

Through questioning and guidance of the different moments that this visit will include the employees will be able to re connect with their own wisdom and values, listen to others knowledge, and widen their understanding of how values can be lived and what difference this will make to the old people they will meet.

This process will with certainly show that it will be small things that will make a difference. It will also support the development of pride when members of the organisation become more aware of that it will be this seemingly “small” but very important action that will make a huge difference.

This particular example above came from my collaboration with a community. The processes ended up in the employees unfolding aspects that would be shown as lived values, examples of these lived values could from their view be shown in for example, being more present, and more relaxed when I visit, by taking my jacket of I will show this, and if I sit with the elder for a couple of minutes in the sofa and listen to the elder this will also show that I am interested and care.

Summary

The process of the organisational relational compass assumes that people have most of the knowledge they need inside but sometimes they need to reconnect and unfold their knowledge. When members of the organisation share reflections and experiences together the sum of the wisdom will grow and everyone will be able to develop their awareness and knowledge with dignity which in its turn will lead to a developed action space of lived values. To learn and grow we need to be safe and feel trust. To create context that will create prerequisites for this will also be important leadership action on the way to develop the learning and value based organisation for the future.

I believe that dignity is very important in all development processes. I have during this research process ended up a lot thinking how we as leaders can be a part of building bridges of dignity that will enable people to move towards the desirable future.

Like the metaphor of Sankofa, it will be important to find the golden egg we can bring into the future, individuals and groups. It will be important to explore the roots that will bring strengths to the organisation but also roots that each individual has and brings. I get the image of us as leaders as a very important part of creating prerequisites for a tree to be healthy and grow. If we look upon an organisation as a tree, the tree needs soil to be able to grow. If the soil is good it is not just the tree that will grow but also the roots will grow.

The roots enable the tree to stand strong when storms come or when it is times of dryness. The roots could preferably be seen as the values we would like to be lived in our organisation, what is us. The trunk could be the metaphor of our strengths and resources and the leaves and fruits could be the gifts we give- the values we live in relationship to our surroundings. If the soil is limited, if the tree will not get the fertiliser and the prerequisites it needs to have a healthy life and grow, there will be no fruits. This metaphor could be developed further and could also be one tool to use in the process with the organisational relational ethical compass.

During this research journey I also have become much more aware of the importance of clarity on several levels. From the view of clarity I also think that organisations need clarity in what values the organisation aims at living. But this clarity will not be lived by formulating nice words; it will be shown in actions. To be able to develop our actions we need to reflect on how they can be lived and experienced. This means that the idea of the compass could be used in a similar way as for the individual leader to explore and unfold values and to develop each member's awareness of the importance of ethical actions to start creating the culture we would like to live in our organisation.

Clarity could also be seen as the ethical direction we want to show. This direction can open up for us as leaders and the members of the organisation to be able to explore and use our action space within these frames. This actions space invites infinite possibilities, use and development of our own resources and responsibility to move towards the desirable future.

The organisational relational compass will pay particular focus to the importance of connectedness, collaboration, pride and meaningful conversations. This will also invite reflections, reflexive aspects and divergent thinking to develop learning and creativity. The organisational relational compass aims at creating a sustainable future with the best benefit for customers and clients in sight. This will also be a journey of developing the organisational culture and aspects who we are and who we would like to be and be experienced. The idea of the compass also invites the organisation to develop its learning and to develop a learning organisation.

We need to never forget that it must be us who by ourselves take the walk and it is only us who can experience the journey, no one can experience it for us, we are the ones who need to do something different to enable difference to be created. When we share our learning we will be able to view the landscape and our surroundings in new ways and see paths we had not thought about walking. When we imagine the destination and where we are heading together this will create new meaning of what could be beyond the horizon. (Kicki Oljemark, 2013)

Hypothetical conclusions

In the view of being a systemic practice research I will not state any truth. I make a choice to present my hypothetical conclusions to show that there could be also other ways of understanding. My understanding is also always emerging which will mean that when this thesis is printed, learnings has emerged and changed.

The position of being a manager and leadership is naturally related to the organisation's task and its members. How employees experience their organisation, its leaders, and their closest leadership influences how the employees experience themselves in the organisation. How employees experience themselves and their possibilities influences how they understand their action space which in its turn influences customers, clients and other people that are in different ways dependent on and related to the organisation.

One of the roots for how leaders live their leadership and lead their organisation is from my view how they understand leadership and its possibilities. One important thing that will make the difference in the possibilities they experience will be how they from this understanding experience their own action space.

I have during this research journey become very interested in how leaders experience their action space related to, their mind-set, their values and how leaders reflect on how they would like their morality to speak in their actions. I have come to find connections to how these aspects can influence the possibilities leaders see, including my-self. These aspects could be seen as an intertwined process of never ending learning where the leader has a possibility to co create the organisation by involving the rest of the members but also

through meaningful and strengthened communication. To be able to communicate and collaborate in a good way leaders need to pay attention to their own development. To be grounded in values could be seen as one way of building on sense-making and possibilities.

My central assumption is that leaders and members of the organisations have more action space than they understand and more knowledge of how they can live their leadership than they at first sight experience.

I believe that all of us in many ways meet our own generalised pictures and it is easy to forget all the knowledge that's beyond this first picture. We also have experiences that we might not have transformed into consciousness yet, experiences and knowledge that could help us to develop our leadership further. Without reflections and a possibility to talk about leadership and one's own development the field of quick fix methods has its bright days.

The research into the question of how leaders have made sense of how they can influence their organisation to work optimally has led me to a couple of hypotheses. These hypotheses are based on a belief that most of our experienced action space as leaders are influenced by our mind set. Most limitations live in our minds.

My hypotheses are also based on that we as leaders have an important task to develop our ethical relational leadership. I also have a belief that we can through value based approaches find inevitable possibilities and endless learning. We will be able to grow as humans and as leaders while we develop our interactions and understanding of ourselves and others in our organisation.

The hypotheses that follow show a summarised picture of how I view leadership possibilities.

The way we view our world makes a difference

As humans we make sense related to our experiences. We are more or less conscious of how we are influenced by our experiences and how this influence affects our thinking, feelings and actions. Our sense-making could also be seen as an active choice. How we choose to look at and understand our experiences will influence the sense we make and

our learning. How we understand our selves, others and our surroundings then depends on our mind-set and the view we take. There are always multiple stories possible to be told.

The journey starts with ourselves

To be able to manage the complex reality of an organisation and to reach out for our own and others' potential in relation to goals is a journey without any fixed answers. The only place we can start is with ourselves. How we communicate, interact and what kind of conversations we invite people into will make a huge difference. We need to be able to lead ourselves and our own emotions before we can lead others in an optimal way.

Each human and each leader is unique and should be. It is not a goal to strive to be like others. We need to find and develop our own unique leadership and personal style based on the values we would like to live and are comfortable with.

Reflections, reflexivity and divergent thinking

I believe that it is easy to underestimate the value of reflections and reflexive processes. These aspects support us as leaders to learn and develop ourselves. Organisations benefit from leaders that are creative and that develops their abilities to imagine different views " a multi verse world view with no right or wrong answer. Different aspects could be as true and people's differences are appreciated and seen as important resource in the organisation.

Appreciate the possibility of growth and new learning

Our strengths and possibilities as leaders can be found within ourselves and within our learning from interactions with others. In order to learn we need to reflect on the experiences we have and have had. If we challenge our own understanding and views we can enable new perspectives and enable new learning. A reflexive approach enables us to learn and to visualise how our learning could be adopted into practice and in relationship to others in the best way. Everyone has potential, also leaders, and it is important to appreciate your own and others' ability to learn and develop.

Language creates our reality

By becoming aware of how we think and feel we also can choose more consciously the words we would like to use and the way we would like to influence others by the way we use different words. When we become aware of the 'ocean of a meaning' of language we will also be able to develop our minds and actions. Language and communication accommodates myriads of possibilities to create meaningful and helpful interactions.

By reflecting on how we use our language and how we communicate we will be able to create new forms of living and understanding for both ourselves and others.

A clear direction allows us to trust the process, invites creativity, unique and optimal outcomes

Leadership is many times challenging with few straight-forward answers. Even if we know where we are heading, we can never know exactly what the journey will include and what it will look like when we have reached the goals we are heading toward. As leaders we need to be clear about the direction but also able to trust the process and its unique potential and outcome while we invite others into co creation. Leaders and members of the organisation need clarity to be able to be creative and contribute in their best way within their own manoeuvring space. Clarity, trust and appreciation will reach out for people's potential.

Values can guide us and enable us to become more proud of the choices we make

Values have a strong influence on leaders' ways of thinking and acting. If we explore the values that drive us and find ways to transform our values into our leadership in a way that is meaningful and constructive for ourselves, others and the organisation, these values can be a strong support for us in our leadership. By guidance of a relational ethical compass we can find ways to become comfortable in our leadership. If we are guided by values we will be able to become more true to ourselves. Values in action will invite pride and joy which in its turn also will support all members of the organisation to give their best.

Everyone is important and can make a difference

Each single person is important for the whole and everyone's contribution will make a difference. When leaders approach people's potential, people will be able to grow and take responsibility. When the goal of the organisation is connected to individuals' dreams and values, meaning and a sense of coherence will be created.

If leaders genuinely believe that everyone has resources and potential and look with appreciative eyes they will find resources that they could not imagine.

The potential of co-creation is infinite

Organisations are co-constructed and built on relationships and the communication people have with each other. The power of co-construction is infinite and a very powerful source in constructing the future of organisations but also to enable people to create common meaning and pride. The optimal co-creation will be developed through appreciative, value based and meaningful communicative processes.

The importance of exploring and honouring people's experiences, knowledge and dreams

To explore what we can learn from the past, what works well in the present, skills and resources of the organisation and its members will give dignity, energy and pride. To invite people of the organisation to envision the desirable future is powerful, it gives a possibility to anchor processes, invites collaboration, responsibility and enables people to give their best in relation to desired goals.

What we are a part of creating in the moment will make a difference for the future

There is no quick fix or methods that can give us all the tools we need to lead. We need to find ways to work with long term goals and at the same time approach the moment and people we meet in constructive, ethical and flexible ways. Actions in the moment will be important for the future. Our ethics will be shown not just in our actions but also in the consequences of our actions.

The main resource for success is the people in the organisation. As leaders we have the privilege to lead people, their resources and potentials toward the goals.

The possibilities leaders have to influence organisations to work optimally are grounded in interactions. Relational aspects invite us into reflection to develop more conscious, value based actions and thoughts.

The HOW will be our guidance and most important question to us as leaders. The how will be shown in the aesthetics and it will invite infinite leadership possibilities.

Participants' last words

I would like to think more about this. What is it that has shaped me more clearly how I am? (Mary)

I believe that it has been important that I have been able to sit in peace and you nearly forced me to think. I had the possibility to reflect on and think a lot over my leadership from the way you asked the questions. I think that I will go on thinking about the bigger question what it is that has influenced the way I look at people, my values. I think that I will carry that question with me. What is it that makes me the person I am, that is really exciting! (Gustav)

I think that it was the questions when you asked me how I thought that my actions influenced others which were most meaningful. For example if I am curious, how does that influence my employees? Sometimes it can be easy to give a quick answer and to think that it is obvious but you went on asking and didn't give up, I was forced to think a little extra. I was strengthened from listening to myself. I became secure/safe and relaxed. These two interviews have made me reflect more; I will go out from this room strengthened in my role. (Gustav)

I noticed during the interviews that I always have been engaged and committed. You made the interviews in a way that the things that are positive came through. (Bo)

I think it is good to have the attitude you have so that it will not get in to a position to defending anything. I think it has felt good that you have focused on what you think has

been creative and good. You need to add that there's so much fun. What a hugely enjoyable task it is to be a manager and leader! I think about it every day that it is so enormously fun and I think the joy I feel also is catching. (Antonia)

It is very enjoyable to see how people grow and how our good work spreads. I feel very happy and inspired over the mission and the possibility to work as a leader.

I think it's so exciting! Please write what an enjoyable task it is to be a leader!!(Antonia)

The unknown offers us inevitable learning. Let us be friendly foreigners and explore new ways of understanding. Step outside your usual arena and visit the unknown and we will experience new things. If we are curious and listen carefully to the views of others we will get learning that we could not have imagined or learnt by ourselves. When we interact we become invited into creation of new meaning, when we look for responses and reflect we can find ways to create meaningful interactions that will allow ourselves and others to give our best and into infinitive learning. (Kicki Oljemark, 2013)

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview questions

Stories leaders tell about how they make sense of leadership and how it is possible for them to influence their organisation to work optimally

Background

How long have you been working as a manger?

How come you started to work as a manger?

Can you describe short how your organisation is organised and work?

How would you like to describe your mission as manager in this organisation?

How would you describe your relationship to your manager?

How do you notice that your manager appreciate the work you are doing?

Organisation / co-worker

How do you want to describe that an organisation that works optimally look like?

What are the signs?

What are the signs on that your organisation is working well?

What are you most proud of in your organisation?

What do you think are the most important prerequisites and success factors in organisations to make them work optimally?

In what ways do you notice your employees' recourses and competence?

How do you want to notice it?

What do you think is important in an organisation to enable people to give their best?

How do you understand what leadership is?

How would you like to describe the difference between leadership and being a manager?

If I would follow you like a fly during a day at your work, how would I notice you Leadership?

Can you give concrete examples of what you are doing?

How are your leadership noticed for the people in your organisation?

How do you notice that your employees appreciate your leadership?

How would you like to describe your leadership style?

What is your leadership style saying about what is important for you in your Leadership?

Can you give t examples of experiences from your childhood/background that has influenced your values and how you think about leadership?

In what ways are these values noticed in your leadership?

Do you have any inspiration sources to your leadership?

Do you communicate your thoughts about leadership with anyone and if so in what ways?

What has been helpful and in what way?

How can you influence your employees to give their best?

What has contributed to this understanding/learning?

What do you believe that you are specially appreciated for in your organisation?

Future

If you would have future support in your leadership what would you like to achieve with that support?

If you move your thoughts some year ahead and look back at your years as a leader what will you be most proud of about what you have done?

If you meet yourselves in that future what tips would the future you give the present you of what to think about in your leadership?

How does your dream about how your leadership will be noticed in the future look like?

Which are your first steps in this direction?

How will others notice these steps?

Evaluation

How was it to be interviewed?

In what ways do you think that I influenced the interview situation and your thoughts?

What kind of questions was most helpful?

Did you get any new thoughts about leadership during the interview?

Follow-up questions

How was it to listen to the interview?

What are you especially impressed by when you listened at yourself?

When you listened what where your reflections about how you have created you r understanding?

Have any new questions arisen?

Do you have any reflections according to the project that you want to share?

What will you specially bring from this interview session?

Appendix 2 – Analysis process

This attachment aims at visualizing steps taken in the analysis process of the interviews and to show examples of how the coding procedure of the interviews was conducted. A more detailed discussion of the influences on and construction of the analysis process can be found in the main body of the thesis and the chapter called Analysis method.

To set the scene for the example that will follow, the context of the analysis is first described below in a summarised way.

Summary steps

This is a summary of the steps of the analysis. Each step is described in more detail below with examples.

1. Mapping the transcripts into three documents representing the three head themes of the research question
2. Coding (first round)
3. Comparing
4. Forming categories
5. Coding (second round)
6. Deriving generalised working themes with vignettes
7. Storying, developing a coherent narrative

Preparation

The analysis could be said to have started already when I decided my focus. Research questions and approach influenced the way I conducted the questions. The questions I

asked the participants and my approach also influenced and co-created the data that arrived.

I interviewed twelve leaders, two interviews with each person making a total of twenty-four interviews. In between the two interviews, they listened to their first recorded interview and were asked to reflect on how they experienced they had made and make sense.

Transcripts were derived from all the interviews to allow for the further analysis.

Step 1: Mapping the transcripts under three head themes

Next first was to divide the data in a way that it became manageable. The research question was translated into its three head themes:

Research question

What stories do leaders tell about how they have made/make sense of leadership and how it is possible for them to influence their organisations to work optimally?

Three head themes

- Stories of sense-making
- Stories of the optimal organisation
- Stories of possibilities to influence

I analysed all interviews and their data with these particular themes in mind and I coloured all text in different colours (representing the three themes) with focus on what I experienced could be connected to the different themes above.

Step 2: Coding (first round)

In order to show how I have worked with the coding process, I will illustrate examples of how I worked with one of the head themes, Stories of sense-making, for three participants, here called Gustav, Antonia and Bo (fictive names).

How I have made sense of leadership

Gustav

If we go a long way back, then it is difficult to know. I have had own experiences of different managers and I have been influenced by different leaders. Unfortunately I have thought that most of them haven't been good but there have been some of them that have had warmth, empathy and being clear about how to run the organisation. This has been warm, secure and harmonic people. This was people that could be very serious in their work but also have a relaxed way of walk in and out the role as a leader.

Codes extracted

Role models, seen in action what has made a difference, values and qualities valued in the meetings. Experiences from approach

I am sad to say that I don't think that I haven't got my ideas from my parents; I have got my values somewhere else. I think that during my years as a teacher my knowledge and experience has grown slowly. Probably from meetings with different children, teenagers and parents in school, I have met different difficulties and been a part of different meetings and conversations; I have seen and experienced a lot.

Codes extracted

Values, learning by doing, through interactions with children, teenagers and parents – trans formed experiences into meaningfulness as a leader

I have left wing sympathies and socialist ground thoughts and values. Words like equal value and solidarity is important for me.

Codes extracted

Political values, a wish to live political values

How do you connect solidarity to leadership? It has to be something about that people has the right to be listened at. Even if all of us aren't so talented and we are talented at different things we are a team and we are equal valuable. Everyone can pull their weight to

Codes extracted

Learning through reflections and how values will be shown and how he want his values to be shown

the anthill, everyone contribute with something. What difference does this thinking do? It is very important that nobody will be left outside, behind and that everyone feels that they are involved and are listened at.

I had thoughts that it was a little bit hard to work as a leader. I now think that it is more and more fun. I feel safer, more secure and relaxed; maybe I don't take it as serious as before which influence my approach.

Codes extracted

Experience of own growth From having fun, becoming more secure and relaxed, developing trust – own mind-set

What difference does this make?

I become more relaxed, if I am more relaxed it is easier for me to disconnect with the work when I go home. I have a huge trust in the employees and I have no problem to delegate.

What have you learned in the school setting about what is important for people to have the possibility to develop and grow? To be able to create curiosity, I think that curiosity is dam important. I have learned that it is important to have the ability to show exiting examples. I have learned the importance of creating good prerequisites, how to encourage people to think and reflect themselves. I think that being curious is dam important.

Codes extracted

Learning from experiences,, the importance of curiosity and also by being inspiring. Experience of when he develops as a person this also makes a difference to his employees

How have you learned?

I believe that it is my experience from different school setting which has very much shaped me and then I have experienced different leaders and I have noticed good sides but unfortunately many bad sides, that is people who have pointed with their whole hand and had not been listening.

Codes extracted

Learning by experiences, reflecting on experiences, a wish to learn by experiences

I have seen result from who is leading the cargo ship outcome can be.

Codes extracted

Role models

What conditions have influenced so that you have been able to come to these conclusions? I guess it is based on the experienced I told you about, I have learned that it is incredible important to listen to people. I think that it also comes from that I am pretty convinced about what the goal is that it is this goal we are heading towards and to get there we can do different things and some of these things are definitely not good.

Codes extracted

Learning by doing, by responses, what happens, reflection, learning based on the goal focus

Do you remember what you thought when you listened at the tape? I thought, what wise things you say G. It was very cool to listen to the conversation we had, it was cool and instructive, created new learning when I had the possibility to reflect.

Codes extracted

Learning by reflecting, put words on thoughts

In what ways did it create new learning? I didn't have my thoughts clearly in front of, a picture in my head about how I think that a leader should be. But when I listened to the tape I thought that, maybe it sounds presumptuous, but I thought that I lived up to my own ideas. When I sat in the interview I had the picture of my-self that I haven't reflected a lot but when I listened I realized that I am secure in my leader role. I was strengthened from listening at myself. I became secure/safe (and relaxed.

Codes extracted

Learn by the possibility to reflect, learn and become strengthened by the approach in the interview and by listening to own thoughts

Just sitting these two coactions have made me to reflect more; I became strengthened and will go out from this room strengthened in my role. I have experienced this like a learning context and education.

Codes extracted

Learning by reflection, the difference of the approach in the "learning situation.

Gustav; codes within the head theme of sense-making

- Role models, seen in action, good and bad experiences
- Own values, political values- influences understanding
- A wish to live political values
- Learning by doing, by responses, what works?

- Learning by interactions
- Transformation process – how can this be understood and connected to leadership?
- How own mind set influences
- A wish to learn
- Reflection, experienced own growth- influenced approach, more relaxed, experienced what happened
- Difference that arose from personal development
- By putting words on thoughts, a possibility to reflect
- Learning from the context of a clear goal focus
- The context of the interviews, listening to own thoughts, possibility to reflect

Antonia

Codes extracted

A wish to learn and develop herself, reflections, goal focus, decided about things she would like to follow, looking for learnings in responses from others – interactions, learning from own development areas

What is it that has shaped me? I think it is life in general and that I have tried to develop myself in the similar way that I would like others to develop themselves. I have decided a couple of things that I would like to guide me in how I would like to approach others, a conscious approach; I need to start with myself. I am trying to reflect a lot on and develop my awareness of how I interact with others, how I and others move. I am thinking about what gets me going and what to do so that I will not end up in the similar situation again. This is the essence of all.

Codes extracted

Role model, lived values, family culture, experience of difference

I think a lot about power and I think that this has been influenced a lot about my father. My father had a lot of power. We had a lot of wood and many employees, my father had a lot of power. I felt that I was encouraged to be and that I was humble in relationship to all

the power we had. I also wanted to be like everyone else and I didn't want to be in a power situation.

Codes extracted

A wish to not stand out

My father always said that it was important that we were humble. All of us children spent a lot of time with him on the property and he gave us articles to read. Antonia, you can think about this, he could say. I think that my father have influenced me a lot in the way to not think that you as a person are especially extraordinary and to use power in a good way.

Codes extracted

Experienced lived values, reflecting about influences of others

You also told me that you like to put things on its head. What has influenced these thoughts? I think that I have become creative by the way I have lived. If we should go back into my childhood then, I am raised by a father who had five children and my mother lived in the south of Europe, I had to manage a lot by myself in this strange world. I lived in the country side of Sweden but also travelled to the south of Europe to meet my mother. My father was always present but I also longed for my mother who could not live in Sweden because of her bad lung capacity. She later also had a man who also became a role model for me. I think that I had to learn to become creative in this strange world. My mum's husband was very different from my father and in the south of Europe there were palm trees and we eat artichokes which no one had heard about in Sweden. I played a lot by myself and wrote a lot, I was very creative as a child.

Codes extracted

Learning from reflecting on childhood experiences, Appreciating life experiences,

Codes extracted

Role models contributing with different views, developed creativity

I have been working with a theatre and during that time I realized the importance of our body language. I got reflections about my own body language and learned to be more conscious about it how I act with my body or how we sit in a room, how it influences others. This is something that I think a lot on as a leader.

Codes extracted

Learning from experiences, reflected on what it is that makes a difference, transforming this experience into leadership

I think that it is really exciting to sit like this. It becomes a possibility for me to reflect. I had the possibility to reflect on and think a lot on

my leadership from the way you asked the questions. I think that I will go on thinking about the bigger question what it is that has influenced the way I look at people - humanity I think that I will carry with me that question. What is it that makes you the person you are, that is really exciting.

Codes extracted

Learning by reflection, getting questions and get the possibility to put words on

It is incredible to be able to do this and to be able to listen to myself on a tape, I think it has been wonderful.

Codes extracted

The importance of what conversations we invite into, importance of reflecting, to put words on thoughts

What did you become most impressed by in your own story?

I think that the thing I am most proud of is the thing that I think that I am a democratic leader. I am a leader who listens. I think that it is important that that people you work with wants to be a part of the journey we do. It is not difficult to point with the whole hand when it comes to the values that we have.

Codes extracted

The wish to live values, reflecting on how to live values and responses in interactions

Antonia, codes within the head theme of sense-making

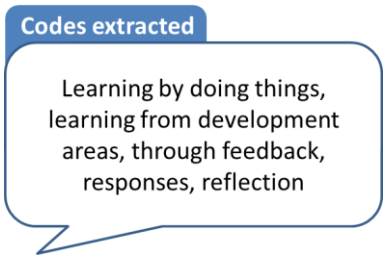
- A wish to learn and to develop herself
- By reflecting, transforming experiences into meaningfulness in leadership
- Role-models
- Experienced lived values
- Family culture
- Life experiences, different perspectives- developed creativity
- Work experiences
- Own values
- Appreciative approach to life experiences

- The importance of taking time, reflect, put words on thoughts
- The wish and driving force to live values
- Goal focus
- Look for learning from responses
- Learning from own development areas
- A wish to not stand out, be careful with power
- Learning from the interview context

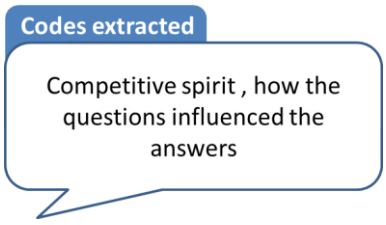
Bo

How have you learned?

Like I say it is through doing things. I got feedback once that I couldn't "accommodate" things, my thoughts and feelings just popped out. I have thought about this and how I can learn but also that feelings are important / feelings are a language and if you do anything about how you feel what will become of that? But I am much careful today, today I show my feelings more constructive.



Did you notice any pattern when you listened to the interview? Yes, that I always have been engaged/committed. That I have competed but there is a reflection to this that you don't always succeed and sometimes you don't have the commitment. You made the interviews in a way that the things that are positive came through but there are other perspectives to.



How have you created your understanding?

You create it through doing things in collaboration with others all the time. To do things all the time and to get experiences. It is important to do things and to not just talk. When you do things, things happen. From the responses and expectations you get from others you get the picture that they think you can do this and then you create a picture of yourself that you are a person that can do this.

Codes extracted

By doing things, through collaboration, When you do things, things happen, get experiences, From the responses and expectations you get, expectation principle, from others you get the picture that they think you can do this and then you create a picture of yourself that you are a person that can do this.

What did you find did protrude in your story about what makes a difference in leadership?

I think, let me think a little that people feel that I am engaged, committed and that they don't feel that I am afraid. To dare to expose yourself and the group for new things, dare to walk on the ice, I think that that is important. I also think that engagement is important and to be here because you want to be here, to have humor and to look at the employees with a glint in your eye and with warmth. What is necessary to be able to have humor? To have distance to you, to have a balance to want things but not to put too much prestige in what is right or wrong.

Codes extracted

Learning: To dare to expose yourself and the group for new things, being brave, engagement is important, A wish to be in the position, importance of humor, To have distance to yourself. To have a balance to want things but not to put too much prestige in what is right or wrong, values, approach to life, to want things

It is like I have talked about before to have the courage. Like when you are going to run a 15000 meters run. It will hurt but you take deep breaths and climb into it. I cannot be a part of that kind of competition any more, it hurts to much, it is too painful, I become so tired, the whole body screams but you still have to move on.

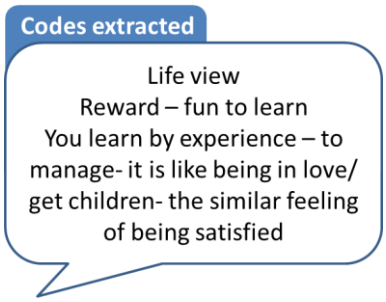
To make it work you have to be receptive, you have to be connected, in some kind of relationship to be open for feedback on one's own leadership.

Codes extracted

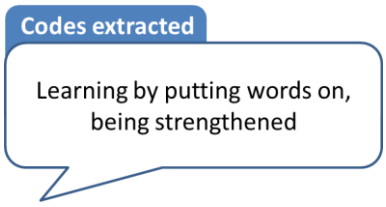
Receptive, to learn by responses, reflections, a wish to learn

What is it that drives you towards ongoing learning?

I don't know that. I think that to learn is a way of living, what's fun about life I can see a similarity with the wish to have time to do different things. It is like being in love or to get children, the similar feeling of being satisfied, you learn by experience what is working and that it works.



I feel strengthened by the interviews I don't usually get time to talk about leadership. We have time with our management team but then we mostly talks about the production.



Bo, codes within the head theme of sense-making

- By doing things – things happen – learning by doing
- A wish to learn
- Expectations creates a picture of what is possible
- Through collaboration
- Learning from responses, to be receptive, look for feedback
- By being brave – exposing himself
- The wish to be in this position
- To have a distance to your-self, avoiding prestige, to have humor – approach - mindset
- Values, approach to life
- Through reflections
- Through questions he gets

Step 3: Comparing

Step 3 was to compare the different codes below each head theme and in the different interviews, ensuring that they make sense, elaborating, exploring different meanings, searching for patterns and similarities.

Step 4: Forming categories

The codes that occurred most frequently became categories. I looked at the data over and over again now with the categories in mind and marked with coloured pencils once more what I found relevant connected to these categories. I collected the material I found under the categories.

Step 5: Coding (second round)

I used the coding process once more and made codes based on things that I found particulary relevant to the different categories, maturing my understanding of the material at hand.

Step 6: Deriving generalised working themes with related vignettes

The most relevant categories were transformed into a set of generalized working themes, each one related to one of the three head themes of the research question.

Below are examples of the themes derived in the sense-making area: (letters A, P, M, E, etc, represent the anonymised identities of the various participants):

Wisdom from the past, family culture – connected to stories from participants A, P, M, E, A, M1 and J

Experiences of values in action – connected to stories from participants A, M, E, A, M1 and J

Role models - connected to stories from participants A, M, G, E, A, M1, S, R and J

A wish to learn - connected to stories from participants A, M, G, O, E, A, M1, S, R, J, B and L

Reflecting, a source for learning - connected to stories from participants A, M, G, O, E, A, M1, S, R, J, B and L

Learning by doing - connected to stories from participants A, M, G, O, E, A, M1, S, R, J, B and L

I then went back to the interviews, via the generalized working themes, the categories and the codes, identifying and collecting vignettes related to the gerneralised working themes. All vignettes related to a specific generalised working theme were collected under said theme. A selection of these vignettes are included in the body of the thesis.

Step 7: Storying

The final step of the analysis was to develop a coherent narrative based on the derived data to be part of the body if the thesis.

Comment on recurring aspects from the analysis

After analysis, the next step became how I responded to the different aspects that arose, in what way they felt relevant and interesting related to my systemic perspective.

These reflections created the discussion related to the analysis and different themes.

The process described above was done for all three head themes related to the research question. Many aspects I found were related to all three head themes and also to the different layers below these. This is how come some aspects come back more than once in my discussion because they are viewed from the perspective of each head theme. The aspects and themes develop through the analysis and writing process.