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A qualitative study of leadership disasters in a Norwegian context: Are constructions of shipwreck leadership a modern phenomenon?

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## Summary

Has shipwreck leadership been an increasing phenomenon from the post-war period up until today?

Shipwreck leadership is (a) a one-time incident or (b) a series of actions conducted by a leader, leading to severe negative outcomes for the organization. With shipwreck leadership, the leader has led the organization to a point of no return, and the board has no other choice than to terminate the leader to be able to move on. Shipwreck leadership can occur in all sectors – business, public and private administration, politics and the military.

After the introduction, we move to the theoretical background where we have selected different theories that we see appropriate to support our research going forward. Based on a literature review, we present five relevant areas of theories (Romanticizing of Leadership; Media Theory; Corporate Governance; Theory of Blame), where we aim to gain an overview of possible mechanisms potentially related to our research question.

After the theoretical review, we present our hypothesis, before elaborating on our planned methodological approaches and research design.

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## 1.0 Introduction

### *1.1 Introduction*

Shipwreck leadership is (a) a one-time incident or (b) a series of actions conducted by a leader, leading to severe negative outcomes for the organization. With shipwreck leadership, the leader has led the organization to a point of no return, and the board has no other choice than to terminate the leader to be able to move on. Shipwreck leadership can occur in all sectors – business, public and private administration, politics and the military.

Leadership is a relatively recent addition to the English language (Google, Ngram Viewer). According to Statistics Norway (SSB, 2017), the total number of leaders in Norwegian stock companies constitute a total of 226 624 Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Our calculations based on the monthly numbers of CEO shifts in Norway from Brønnøysundregisterene (2017) shows that the total number of CEO shifts in Norway in 2017 amounts to 19,253. Making the monthly average CEO succession in Norway equalling 1,604 in 2017.

Alvesson & Sveningsson (2003, p. 359) describes leadership as a “topic— or rather a label for a variety of more or less related issues—that has received attention in thousands of empirical studies, theoretical work, and popular writings offering more or less well-grounded recipes for successful managerial work”. Yet, it is not sufficient to look at leadership in an isolated perspective when investigating how leadership is constructed in the media. According to Bennis (2007), psychologists have spent decades studying leadership, with the joint conclusion that leaders do not exist in a vacuum – hence emphasizing the importance of looking at leadership from a broader and more contextual point of view. However, the tendency to look at leaders as the primary influencer on organizational outcomes still persists.

Arnulf et al. (2012, p. 18) claims that “As long as there is hope, the manager is a hero even when facing superior opponents, but when doubt and despair prevails, the same person is perceived as a loser”. While the concept of leadership has been extensively researched and studied, the definition of the concept remains unclear. In much of the leadership literature and how the concept is depicted in the media, leaders are found to be the primary force and reason behind organizational activities and outcomes (Chen & Meindl, 1991; Mazza & Alvarez, 2000; Kabanoff et al., 1995). In other words, we might use leaders as a

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way to make sense of complex organizational phenomenon (Meindl et al., 1985). Meindl et al. (1985) discusses if our romanticizing of leadership affects our perception of leadership, and the fact that we often believe that leaders are or should be able to control and influence the future of organizations. Expecting leaders to have such control over the organization is according to Salancik and Meindl (1984) a double edged-sword, because the leader will get the credit for the success, but also the entire blame if things go wrong. Given the power and influence leaders are thought to have, corporate governance structures have been developed to reduce the risk of leaders' self-interest to act according to their own agenda. Corporate governance research has a strong emphasis on the tools and procedures shareholders can use to protect themselves from self-interested leaders (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Daily et al., 2003). However, these mechanisms such as scapegoating, may very well be used to protect the organization from a reputation of failure, placing the blame on leaders.

Many Leadership disasters and failures are depicted through the media, and the media's influence can be argued to play a role in determining the survival of the leader (Macnamara, 2005). To strengthen their credibility, and hence their influence, the media often looks for expert opinion to build on their cases. Expert power is the "influence based on others' belief that the power holder possesses superior skills and abilities" (Forsynth, 2010, p. 223), and is common way for the media to use expert power is to either use external experts to comment cases. Such experts can often be professors, scholars, or specialized journalists within the particular field. By doing this, the media will appear to be more of a trustworthy source and reliable source of information. When the media achieve this trustworthiness "consumers of expert pronouncements [in the media] leave our judgments in the power of experts, because we have an uncontrollable need to believe in a controllable world and our flawed understanding of the laws of chance" (Tetlock, 2017, p. 63). When combining consumers' needs for easy explanations with the media's increasing need for sensation and breaking news (Nielsen et al., 2016; Bens and Hamelink, 2007; Hayward et al., 2004), it can send an organization down the rabbit hole – leading boards, backed up by corporate governance structures, to terminate the leader from his position. Based on this, our aim is to make an historical overview of what made a leader a suffer dramatic shipwreck in the media. The research question is therefore as follows:

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*Has shipwreck leadership been an increasing phenomenon from the post-war period up until today?*

## **2.0 Theoretical background**

The theoretical background is characterized by theory that we see beneficial to enhance the understanding of the context in which our research question operates.

### ***2.1 The Romanticizing of Leadership***

According to Alvesson and Spicer (2012, p. 384), leadership is so widespread it may mean almost anything to anyone. In an attempt to find the consensus, Yukl (2013, p. 23) defines leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.”. Many theorists and researchers argue that leaders can influence the performance of an organization in various ways, through decisions on strategy, human resources and management programs, structure and systems (Yukl, 2013; Porter, 1980; Bower 1970; Rumelt, 2011). Moreover, different personal qualities such as charisma is found to enhance performance in circumstances such as uncertainty (Waldman et al., 2001).

Some traits are seen to be beneficial for leadership success, such as drive, self-confidence and cognitive ability (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, p. 49). At the same time, there is a common realization that executives, including CEO's are constrained by many factors beyond their control (Hambrick & Quigley, 2014; Lieberman & O'Connor, 1972; Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). As Lieberman & O'Connor states (1972, p. 118) “One never knows what might have been, had a different man been leader”. Their analysis showed that much of the variance in the performance variables of sales, earnings, and profit margins can be explained by other factors than leadership variance (Lieberman & O'Connor, 1972, p. 129). Due to such findings, leadership effectiveness is often found difficult to evaluate as there is many measures of effectiveness, and there seems to be no consensus on the most relevant measure (Yukl, 2013, p. 9).

Meindl et al. (1985, p. 78) state that the “social construction of organizational realities has elevated the concept of leadership to a lofty status and level of significance”. Critics of agency theory argue that it is a simplistic theory (Daily et al. (2003) – this will be further discussed in the corporate governance

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section. Meindl et al. supports this notion by discussing the significance placed on leadership as a response to the ill structured problem of understanding the causal structure of complex, organized systems. They emphasize that “as observers and as participants in organizations, we may have developed highly romanticized, heroic views of leadership – what leaders do, what they are able to accomplish, and the general effect they have on our lives” (Meindl et al., 1985, p. 79). Their main argument is that the concept of leadership is a perception people use to make sense of complex organizational phenomena, and in this sense-making process leadership has gotten a romanticized and heroic role. Further, Meindl. et al. propose that the perception of leaders as heroes, and the romanticized conceptions of them will have the greatest sway in extreme cases – with either very good or very poor cases of performance – where the observes understand these events in terms of leadership (Meindl et al.1985, p.80).

Pfeffer (1977, p. 104) supports this view by arguing that leaders serve as symbols for representing personal causation of social events. Additionally, Pfeffer argues that there are at least three reasons for why observed effects of leaders on organizational outcomes are minimal:

*“First, those obtaining leadership positions are selected, and perhaps only certain, limited styles of behavior may be chosen. Second, once in the leadership position, the discretion and behavior of the leader are constrained. And third, leaders can typically affect only a few of the variables that may impact organizational performance.” (Pfeffer, 1977, p. 105)*

It is argued that the choice of one particular leader has limited impact on the organization's relatively permanent strengths and weaknesses (Khurana, 2002, p. 62). Events with large impact are easier to comprehend when one can attribute the events to the actions of individuals, instead of going through the process of considering the interplay of social, economic, and other impersonal aspects that constrain and effects the heroic leader (Khurana, 2002, p. 62). Alvesson and Spicer (2012, p. 381) further argue that the alternative to celebration and naturalization of leadership is not an equally naive rejection of leadership. However, the narrow focus on leaders as heroes often means attributing incredible powers to leaders. This is referred to as the “Fundamental Attribution Error”, and is the tendency to overestimate the impact of individuals. The Fundamental Attribution Error is argued to be the main reason for the ever increasing succession of business leaders (Khurana, 2002, p. 62, 63). Thus in many cases, the



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firing of leaders might need to be explained in relation to other attributions rather than expected improvements in team performance (De Paola & Scoppa, 2012; Arnulf et al., 2012). Yet, leadership changes do not happen in situations that are exact and identical, making it difficult to infer the degree to which organizational outcomes reflects a leadership effect – as opposed to forces outside a leader's control (Lieberson & O'Connor, 1972, p. 118).

## ***2.2. Media influence and CEO celebrities constructed by the media***

During the last few decades, there has been an unprecedented growth in media coverage on issues regarding organizational and management matters (Chen & Meindl, 1991). In turn, this has led to a new type of business press – a business press with mass media appeal (Chen & Meindl, 1991). Whilst the main responsibility of the business media is to provide facts and information about businesses and organizations, it is ostensible that business journalism also have a greater responsibility of researching, questioning and communicating more significant messages about organizations and their functions (Chen & Meindl, 1991). Although business media work towards broadcasting objective news, the concept of the news production processes cannot go by without pointing out that the effect of the human element is important to consider in such a process, because a process where the human aspect is incorporated is unlikely to bring truly objective news to the public (Simons, 2013, p. 148). Tetlock (2017, p. 63) propose that “the three principles – authoritative sounding experts, the rating conscious media, and the attentive public – may be locked in a symbiotic triangle. It is tempting to say they need each other too much in order to terminate a relationship because it is based on an illusion”. In his project, he found that hedgehog opinion (e.g. viewing the world through the lens of a single idea) was in greater demand from the media than foxes (e.g. viewing the world through a variety of experiences), because “simple, decisive statements are easier to package in sound bites” (Tetlock, 2017, p. 217). Making the same style of reasoning that reduce expert performance on scientific indicators of good judgments to enhance the attractiveness to the mass market-driven media (Tetlock, 2017, p. 217).

The news industry has been through a major digital transformation and many news organizations are facing severe challenges in getting attention from the readers (Nielsen et al., 2016). This can affect business news in several ways regarding how leadership is constructed in the media. As Chen & Meindl (1991,

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p. 522) emphasises, “news organizations are directly dependent on market forces and appeal directly to popular opinions”. This means that in order to survive as a news transmitter – they need to sell the news. But how does that go about? Among journalists and news editors, it has become a well-known secret that sensation, conflict and intrigue sells. According to Bens and Hamelink (2007, p.13) quality newspapers have not only adopted the tabloid format, but also redesigned layouts and content with the sole purpose of increasing circulation figures. This has made its way into the news broadcasts. Research by Bens and Hamelink (2005, p. 18) has shown that the share of foreign, national, and social and economic news has decreased in favour of trivial sensation, human interest and crime reporting, all of which undermine traditional news values and norms. The authors argue that journalists are obliged to go further and further to score a scoop, hence leading them to a wild hunt for sensation and a greater focus on people over events.

When it comes to broadcasting business news, this may have large impacts for what angles are chosen for the news stories. Chen and Meindl (1991) argue that the business press is especially prone to interpret organizational outcomes in terms of leadership. As purveyors of the news, journalists are constantly in need of explaining a firm's' actions or performance to the public in the most understandable way possible. Hayward et al. (2004) suggests that journalists work under great pressure, and that their high work demands cause them to magnify ‘the fundamental attribution error’ by putting too much of an emphasis on a single actor’s dispositional qualities. This proposition is in line with Tetlock’s (2017, p. 217) disconcerting result in his project, namely the discovery of an “inverse relationship between how well experts do on scientific indicators of good judgements and how attractive these experts are to the media and other consumers of expertise”. He explains this through the strong desire among mass-public consumers to believe that they live in a predictable world, thus making the hedgehog opinion the most attractive opinion of all (Tetlock, 2017, p.335). Therefore, Hayward et al. (2004, p. 638) argues that “In the process of attributing a firm’s actions and performance to its CEOs, journalists create ‘celebrity CEOs.’”. Cognitive constraints are rooted in human nature (Tetlock, 2017, p.232), and due to the complexity of organizational matter, journalists defend their personification by rationalizing that the public will understand organizational outcomes better if they are angled as personal attributes - and not as a complex and series of events.

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As Gitlin (1980, p. 146) puts it, “In the mass mediated reality, organizations, bureaucracies and movements — in fact all larger and more enduring social formations — are reduced to personifications”. The messages sent are arguably much more than a set of rational acts of transmission.

As a societal function, the presence of the free press and independent new medias are one of the most important pillars of a free, democratic society. With their ability to set the agenda on societal questions, change existing beliefs and to determine what issues are more important than others (Chen & Meindl, 1991, p. 521), the press is as a consequence often referred to as the fourth estate (Bang, 2003). “News in leading media has been shown to significantly affect stock prices; lead to corporate collapses; cause falls in sales of products; result in the resignation of senior office-holders — even bring down Presidents” (Macnamara, 2005, p. 1). Simons (2013, p. 145) argue that the notion of the fourth estate is the ideological foundation of journalism in the west, and propose that journalism is something that supports the public interest through operating as an independent actor. By holding these properties, the press is a power factor in society through its ability to illuminate what is happening in society on a large scale. Therefore, it can be argued that the real value of the press lies in their ability to set the public agenda, and to shed a light on dark corners of society (Bang, 2003. p. XX). In that sense, the hunt for sensation and creating of Celebrity CEOs can be arguing to be a major scratch in the pain for serious journalism. As Simons (2013, p. 145) puts it, the role of mass media is to be the public's source of what they would not normally witness. This can be argued to be especially relevant when it comes to the business media, because as opposed to other public events, events occurring within closed organizations can be argued to be even more off-access for large parts of the public. In such cases, the social responsibility of the business media can be argued to be highly relevant.

### ***2.3 Corporate governance***

By looking into Corporate Governance structures, we aim to gain a clearer understanding of how and why leaders seemingly more often get fired when attracting large amounts of negative effects from the media. By looking into corporate governance, our intention is to understand the theoretical framework that can contribute to fully comprehend how organizations choose to deal with the media's construction of leaders.

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According to Perrow (1986, p. 18), the practice of feathering one's nest reflects the problem of separating the interests of the person from the interests of the organization. Furthermore, Perrow postulates that "people tend to act as if they own their positions: they use them to generate income, status and other things that rightfully belong to the organization" (Perrow, 1986, p.15). Based on such views, corporate governance mechanisms have been developed to control the self-interest of leaders of organizations. Daily et al. (2003, p. 371) defines governance as: "the determination of the broad uses to which organizational resources will be deployed and the resolution of conflicts among the myriad participants in organizations". They emphasize that the dominant perspective put upon corporate governance theory is agency theory, and that governance mechanisms as deterrents to managerial self-interest are conceptualized in nearly all modern governance research (Daily et al., 2003, p. 371). Jensen & Meckling (1976, p. 308) define an agency relationship as: "a contract under which one or more persons (the principal(s)) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision-making authority to the agent". To limit agency conflicts and reduce agency costs, various internal and external mechanisms have been suggested through what is known as corporate governance, including board size and composition and managerial ownership (Haniffa & Hudaib, 2006). Organizations can invest in information systems, for instance boards can be used for monitoring executive behaviors, budgeting systems or reporting procedures (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Subsequently, a broad definition of corporate governance is that a company's owners make sure that management takes into account the effect of the company's actions on the owners, creditors and stakeholders' welfare (Bøhren, 2011, p. 251). The board represents an additional agent link between the owners and management. The board therefore creates agent costs if the board members' interests do not coincide with the owners. This is the disadvantage of boards and at the same time a central concern that the owners must take into consideration when electing board members (Bøhren, 2011, p. 105). The control task of the board follows from conflict of interest and delegation in the principal-agent model. Therefore, the directors "police" role is to hire, supervise, compensate and fire CEO's (Bøhren, 2011, p. 106; Daily et al., 2003, p. 375). The adviser assignment adds expertise in areas where the company is missing it. Ownership management is not about daily operations. That is, the line from management and

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down the organization. It concerns the line from the management and upwards to the board and the owners. This underlines the board's advisory task in strategic matters (Bøhren, 2011, p. 120). Consequently, the board functions as an extended leadership group (Bøhren, 2011, p. 257).

Daily et al. (2003, p. 371) explains the popularity of agency theory in governance research to be based on two factors. First, the simplicity of the theory, where corporations are reduced to the managers and shareholders. In which the interest of each are thought to be clear and consistent. Secondly, the common belief that humans are self-interested and unwilling to sacrifice personal interests for the interest of others is a widespread notion. Supporting the notion of agency theory as a simple theory, Davis et al. (1997, p. 20) argue that the exclusive reliance upon agency theory is unfortunate because the complexities of organizational life is ignored. They highlight the need for looking to stewardship theory to explain what causes interests to be aligned, as opposed to the one way focus on addressing manager-principal interest divergence through agency theory. Stewardship theory explains situations where individual goals are not the primary motivation of managers, but where managers are stewards with motives that are aligned with the objectives of their principals. The manager as a steward protects and maximizes shareholders wealth through firm performance and by doing so the manager's utility function are maximized (Davis et al., 1997, p. 21, 25). Managers recognize that the firm's performance directly influence perceptions of the managers performance, and in order to protect their reputation as decision makers leaders are inclined to operate the organisation to maximise the financial performance (Daily et al., 2003, p. 371). Consequently, the difference between the two theories lies in the mechanisms influencing the needs of the manager. In stewardship theory, managers realize the trade-off between personal needs and organizational objectives, and by working towards organizational collective ends, personal needs are met – whilst in agency theory, the principal and the agent solely focus on their personal gain (Davis et al., 1997, p. 22, 25).

According to Davids et al. (1997, p. 24), agency theory provides a useful way of explaining relationships where the parties' interests are at odds and can be brought more into alignment through proper monitoring and a well-planned compensation system, while stewardship theory is a useful way of explaining relationships where the interests are aligned. Moreover, agency theory prescription to replace poorly performing managers assumes that there are ready

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and able replacements to step in for those removed (Daily et al., 2003, p. 378). Hambrick and D'Aveni (1988; 1992) describes corporate failures as downward spirals, in which executives are replaced quickly and frequently which leaves no time to plan and implement strategies that could save the organization (Daily et al, 2003, p. 378).

Gamson and Norman (1964, p. 70 ) describes this practice as ritualistic scapegoating as a way to distance themselves from the failure and as an illustration of actions to deal with the organizational difficulties, when they very often know that real improvement comes through a long range of organizational decisions. This ritual may well, according to Hambrick and D'Aveni (1992, p. 1461), help to propel executive turnover, as the organisation continually try to reconfigure their top teams to fit their ever-shifting direction. Arnulf et al. (2012, p. 171) supports this phenomenon by arguing that in corporate governance, the reasons behind deciding to part with the CEO might not be based on the person's capabilities. The boards might want to signal that bad performance will have consequences. It is proposed that in times where the profitability goes down, the board gets greater independence (Bøhren, 2011, p. 119). One possible explanation is that increasing profitability gives the management the power to make the board more dependent, however, in times of crisis the management have more difficulty in suggesting board candidates (Bøhren, 2011, p. 119). Subsequently, decreasing the chances of support from the board in times of crisis.

#### ***2.4 Theory of Blame***

As previously discussed within Corporate Governance, leaders and CEO's are often removed by the board to reassure shareholders and stakeholders that everything is managed properly within the organization. By solely blaming the leader for causing the problems, other more profound and complex organizational issues are overlooked. Yet, few will argue that the leaders are not at least in parts responsible for the problems, as it is their job to manage the organization. Still, it can be questioned why leaders are so exposed to being terminated in such cases.

Malle et al. (2014, p. 150) points out that "blame is not merely a wrongness judgment", and suggests that blame and wrongness of doing are in fact two different constructs. Salanick and Meindl (1984, p. 238) found that the managements of unstable firms who are lacking real control over organizational outcomes, strategically manipulate causal attributions to manage impressions of

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their control. As evidence of this, these managements claim responsibility for both positive and negative outcomes more than the managements of firms with stable performances. Contrary to psychological theories, these managements seem reluctant to attribute poor performance to uncontrollable environmental events (Salanick & Meindl, 1984, p. 238). Therefore, in cases of bad organizational outcomes, it seems more reasonable for the leader to become the scapegoat, making an impression to the public that it was solely the leader who was causing the problems, and not deeper organizational issues. For involved third parties, such as shareholders, this may restore the belief that the company is create an impression that everything is sound. While some might be sceptical, Rabstajnek (2007) claims that this practise actually has its functions. Rabstajnek suggests that the scapegoat in a business serves a similar purpose to the identified patient in a dysfunctional family. By identifying what is thought to be the weak link, the scapegoating enables the system dysfunction to continue. When focusing on the identified patient as the “sick” family member, other family members can ignore their own pathology and other dysfunction in the family system. It might be stating the obvious – but this will not help better the core problems, because as Rabstajnek argues; blissful ignorance does not change the reality of what caused the difficulty in the first place.

Even though Rabstajnek (2007) argued that appointing a scapegoat can have its functions, Ross (2000) found that it can be harmful for the organization's reputation, leading to a biased media coverage of the organization. Particularly, Ross refers to a Worth Magazine's cover story where leaders as public figures are discussed. The story shines a light on CEO's as prominent public figures, which makes stakeholders distinctively aware that CEO decisions and pronouncements can have a profound and often sudden impact on the value of their holdings. Fortunes can be made or lost in an instant. In such cases, the reality of business and risk involvement is certain to create both heroes and scapegoats. A bad reputation should not be underestimated, and if it is; it is certainly not without risk, should we believe Aula (2010). Reputation risk is, according to Aula (2010), the possibility or danger of losing one's reputation, presents a threat to organizations in many ways. The loss of reputation affects competitiveness, local positioning, the trust and loyalty of stakeholders, media relations, and the legitimacy of operations, even the license to exist. A serious threat to the existence

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of any organization battling to stay competitive in tough economic times and global markets.

### **3.0 Planned study**

Based on the theoretical background, we see an increasingly romanticized idea of what leaders are, in addition to an increased focus on leadership in the media. Hence, we suggest that there is a lack of correlation between the construct of a leadership (both in regular people's perception and in the media) and the actual leadership behaviors, creating a gap where followers and boards' expectations are not met. In regard to this, we propose that the effects of romanticizing leaders and personification of organizational outcomes has further propagated into all aspects of leadership, making the leader accountable for a broader spectre of their actions now than they have been at previous times. In turn, we propose that this lead boards to terminate the leader more often now than before. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis: Due to an increased romanticizing of leadership, we propose that shipwreck leadership has been an increasing phenomenon from the post-war period up until today.*

## **4.0 Methodology**

### ***4.1 Research strategy***

In order to conduct our research, we will use a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research holds an inductive view where theory is generated out of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 386). Further, Van Maanen (1979, p. 520) states that qualitative methods is best described as an "umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world". By having a qualitative research strategy, we are better able to collect deep and rich data, enabling us to conduct thorough analysis and to gain a broader and contextual understanding of how shipwreck leadership is constructed in the media.



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## **4.2 Research method**

To collect data, we will conduct an extensive media content analysis in order to investigate how shipwreck leadership has been constructed in the media from the post-war period and until today. According to Berelson (1952, p. 18) “content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication”, and as Kabanoff et al. (1995) further suggests, content analyses are an adequate method in order to research and analyze organizational values.

“Qualitative content analysis examines the relationship between the text and its likely audience meaning, recognizing that media texts are polysemic – i.e. open to multiple different meanings to different readers – and tries to determine the likely meaning of texts to audiences. It pays attention to audience, media and contextual factors – not simply the text.” (Macnamara, 2005, p. 5).

Consequently, a qualitative media analysis relies largely on the researcher's interpretation of the texts. A media content analysis can therefore be argued to a beneficial method used in creating a foundation for our research, and to gain a deeper understanding of how shipwreck leadership is constructed in the media. Additionally, a media content analysis will also be more likely to provide us with largest amounts of data, and in our cases, give us the best substance to conduct realistic analysis on. As opposed to other qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, where we are less likely to get the same breadth in our data. However, if possible or necessary, we will be looking into conducting interviews with relevant objects for supplementary information. The most applicable and relevant objects for such interviews would be former subordinates of the leader, or former employees in the organization where our case object was leader. The content that is to be analyzed will primarily be obtained from mass media. Previous studies (e.g. Chen & Meindl, 1991; Mazza & Alvarez, 2000) have successfully managed content analysis through analysis of the popular press, and we intend to follow their example. However, as these studies were conducted several decades ago, we aim to have a broader multimedia focus, as opposed to only focusing on newspaper articles and traditional medias. Further, our research will solely be conducted in a Norwegian context.

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### ***4.3 Research design***

To create a structured overview of examples, we aim at producing two main outcomes: (a) a table collecting as many cases as possible of shipwreck leadership from the post-war period (< 1945) up until today, in addition to (b) a selection of especially representative or interesting cases from the different time intervals, which will be looked at more in-dept. The study will be conducted as a comparative case study, where we have the possibility of seeing the development of the cases over time, hence making it a longitudinal study as well.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) good cases are essential in achieving a good understanding of the topic being researched. Therefore, we will thoroughly investigate a broad range of relevant and potential cases in order to select the best cases available to look at in-dept. This type of category of multiple or collective cases are described by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 60) as jointly undertaken to explore a general phenomenon – which is mainly what we aim to do. Our research design will be conducted as a comparative study, where we conduct the study using identical methods on all cases, before we compare and contrast the cases.

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