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## **STORY OF MY LIFE: HOW LIFE EVENTS AND RELATIONS HAVE LED TO MY LEADERSHIP EMERGENCE**

*A qualitative study of formative and relational life stories that are significant for leadership emergence*

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The author Rasheed Ogunlaru says: *“Life is a series of events and sensations. Everything else is interpretation. Much is lost in transition - and added in assumption / projection”*. Indeed, this is something we have experienced when working with this thesis, which we also hope we have managed to communicate to the readers.

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And for our coherent ideas, we solemnly swear they are all ours.



Sara Øien Hansen  
Oslo, August 2016



Kristine Johanne Brott  
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## **Abstract**

The aim of the thesis is to study leadership as an emergent phenomenon with an emphasis on relational and formative experiences. To understand leadership emergence, the thesis use a practice-lens based on knowledgeable leader's life narratives, and more interestingly how leaders have reflected and found meaning in the events. Based on a life story approach and insights from leader's individual stories, four broad categories are identified: (1) *getting people oriented through teams*, (2) *using struggles as sources of growth*, (3) *taking responsibility for progression*, and (4) *appropriating and channeling voices*. Additionally, we have observed how sensemaking of certain life events can contribute to outcomes of agency- and communion themes and how these two themes impact and interact with each other. Moreover, our findings have revealed key tensions across the different categories that may work as trigger events for reflections and creating new learning. To emerge as leaders our findings show a high concern for taking responsibility for own development, through being aware of possibilities that lie ahead. Our findings indicate that it is not the events themselves that are the reason for leadership emergence. It is rather how individuals reflect on and makes sense of events, how events influence individual's meaning making, and how the individuals use the learnings to develop certain qualities and behaviour patterns they use as leaders.

## 1.0 Introduction

Understanding leadership and why some leaders have been known for conducting great leadership has been of interest for many years. It is suggested that studies of leadership have overlooked an important aspect; their life story (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005). Perhaps leaders have lives filled with events and relations that have formed and led them to become the leader they are today. It can be events that have strengthened them, challenged their values or mentality and further have helped them to execute great leadership.

In the thesis we want to study leadership as an emergent phenomenon based on formative and relational experiences to understand what types of events that may be particularly significant for an individual's leadership emergence. To gain a better understanding of the concept it is necessary to understand what leadership is. There are different definitions of leadership that express the concern of good or efficient leadership and definitions that aim to label how leadership should be executed (Skogstad 1997, Northouse 2011, Yukl 2006). According to some researchers, leadership may be about inspiring people to work for the company's goals and objectives (Hogan and Kaiser 2005, Kaiser, Hogan, and Craig 2008). Nevertheless, Ciulla (2004) argues that many scholars do not distinguish between "what is leadership" and "what is good leadership?" and most existing definitions rather describe good leadership (Stashevsky, Burke, and Burke 2006, Ciulla 2004). One definition of leadership is

*"Leadership is a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group and organization"* (Yukl 2006, p.3)

Leadership has been studied for a long time where personality and context-specific events are often highlighted as crucial for explaining aspects of leadership and how it emerges. Some researchers argue that leadership emergence, and who is considered a leader talent, is closely related to personality (Bono and Judge 2004, Judge et al. 2002, Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991). Judge et al. (2002) claim the basis for trait differences between non-leaders and leaders. Even though personality has often been linked to leadership emergence, research also proposes that it is not enough to have a convenient personality to become a leader (Day

2001). Hamilton and Bean (2005) and Riegel (1975) state that leadership is a function of interpersonal development where social interaction between the leader, followers and the situation is crucial. To develop leadership, researchers highlight the importance of context and environmental factors to get a successful outcome (Riegel 1975, Avolio and Luthans 2006, Avolio 1999).

Even though we are aware of the importance of personality and context-specific events, we suggest that leadership can emerge through a person's life story. Thus, leadership can develop over time and not necessarily only develop based on their position in the organization or authority. Rather, how they emerge by influences and events through their personal and professional lives is also crucial. Therefore, we want to study what types of experiences throughout life that shape great leadership with a strong emphasis on how leaders evaluate these experiences and how it influence their identity. People never goes through life without interaction with other people and because of this it is important to take into consideration the relational aspects as social- and verbal interactions have been highlighted as crucial factors for leadership emergence (Kickul and Neuman 2000). Hence, we also aim to understand which types of relations, such as family, friends, romantic relations, role models, mentors etc., influence leadership behaviour and to which extent these are essential for why and how they have become the leader they are.

With a life story approach the interviewees can contribute with events and stories from their lives. Based on these events we can evaluate how they make sense of the events and how it has resulted in their leadership emergence. This will, with contribution from our own data collection, be based on previous research as several researchers argue that leadership and leadership emergence are highly influenced by life narratives and life events (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Shamir and Eilam 2005, Bluck and Habermas 2000, Ligon, Hunter, and Mumford 2008). Human beings use life stories to make sense of events and use these events to guide them through their lives. As such, maybe researchers should have greater focus on people's life story when studying leadership as the stories typically involve elements of important messages about identity, values, behaviours and beliefs that may explain how they have emerged as leaders.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Personality approaches to leadership**

Several researchers argue that leadership, and who is considered as a leader talent, is closely related to personality (Bono and Judge 2004; Judge et al. 2002; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991). Personality can be defined as characteristics that explain the behaviour pattern of a human and further claim to be relatively stable throughout life (Goldberg 1990).

The five-factor model of personality (the Big Five) has been widely used to describe main aspects of personality (Goldberg 1990). The model describes five main domains that are used to define the personality; *extraversion*, *openness*, *agreeableness*, *neuroticism* and *conscientiousness*. Bass and Stogdill (1990) state that all studies included in their review found a positive relationship between low neuroticism and leadership. In addition, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) and Judge et al. (2002) argue that good leaders are more likely to be perceived as lively and energetic, which may be associated with extraversion. Openness to experience is also positively related to good leadership and individuals who are open to new experiences are more likely to emerge as leaders (Judge et al. 2002; Sosik, Kahai and Avolio 1998). In addition to the Big Five, McAdams (2010) describe *hardiness* as crucial for psychology of meaning. Kobasa (1979) and McAdams (2010) argue that individuals that are high on hardiness are more likely to deal with uncertainty and change easier than individuals who are low on hardiness. Hardiness can be seen as part conscientious, low neuroticism and high openness to experience (Bogg and Roberts 2004).

### **2.2 Emergence and social formation of leadership**

Even though personality has often been linked with leadership emergence, research proposes that it is not enough with a convenient personality to become a leader (Day 2000). Leadership as phenomenon shaped by context-specific events and relationships have for some researchers been seen as crucial in development of leadership (Riegel 1975). For example, Robinson and Wick (1992) claim that approximately 70% of leadership development occurs in the context of the work. Stogdill (1948) was the first to connect leadership with such factors. He claimed that leadership had a lot to do with the context. Thus, he proposed that one could

be a great leader in one context and not a leader in another context. This way of looking at leadership is also supported by Smirich and Morgan (1982), who argue that leadership is not only a process of acting and behaving but also a process of reality construction and a deep structure of meaning and action. Thus, they claim that there is no recipe to follow for becoming a great leader as different contexts and organizations have unique ways of making meaning. This way of looking at leadership may indicate that it is more determined by meaning making and change of behaviour through events and experiences than assumptions about traits traditional leadership theories often are based on. This is also in line with Hamilton and Bean (2005) and Riegel (1975) who propose that leadership emerges as people build, sustain and manage their interpersonal relationships.

One branch of the research on leadership as interpersonal development is that mentors and role models are important for emerging leadership (Day 2000). A role model is someone others desire to be like, in the future or present. The mentor's role is to give the protégé feedback and guidance, act like role models and give constructive critique (Noe 1988). People can become better leaders through mentoring as the mentors can use own experiences to increase the protégé's skills (Noe 1988). Having a mentor is something many people can relate to, as through our life we have had some people, maybe teachers, coaches or managers that have contributed to our personal development through inspiration and help. In line with Noe's (1988) research on the importance of role models and mentors, interviews of leaders conducted by Standford-Blair and Dickmann (2005) discovered that mentoring was important for leadership development and emergence, where the mentors gave them feedback, guidance and acted like role models, constructive criticizers and skill builders. Thus, use of mentors can provide career-facilitation through giving challenging functions. Mentoring can therefore contribute through counselling, encouraging and coaching (Noe 1988). Tonidandel, Avery and Phillips (2007) have through their study showed that use of mentors can give success for the protégé. Through a study of a female basketball team it was shown that the performance among the athletes increased through the use of mentors.

The mentor-protégé relationship is often concerned with feedback and Kluger and DeNisi (1996) argue that an environment that considers feedback as important is crucial for leadership emergence. However, for some, feedback can be perceived

as threatening and as criticism. As of this, it is crucial that to become a leader one must be willing to accept advice and feedback (Day 2000). Moreover, one should support feedback for leadership to occur and for leadership to emerge the feedback should be constructive and directed towards learning (Ford and Weissbein 1997).

### **2.3 Narrative approaches to leadership**

Humans create stories to organize a big load of information (McAdams 1993). A narrative approach for leadership aim to understand how previous experiences may have contributed to form you. According to Bluck (2003), narratives serve a function of creating a unique identity. Individuals can create a unique life story to serve their needs of self-function but also to present themselves to others. Doing so, individuals create themes and plots, which further create an understanding of themselves and the social situation they are in. As such, the narrative approach does not claim objectivity but instead highlight positionality and subjectivity (Kohler-Riessman 2000).

Life narratives create, according to Kegan and Lahey (1984), a ‘meaning system’, where a person’s feelings, thoughts and actions are analyzed and interpreted so that it creates personal meaning. The narrator, or the storyteller, selects elements that will confer meaning on previous events (Josselson and Lieblich 1999).

Looking through literature of narratives and life stories, a common factor is that leaders use previous experiences to create and express identity and build an image (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler 2005; Bruner 1991; Gergen 1994). This identity is spoken, reviewed and retold throughout life and the story creates a personal identity that exposes what we say and think about ourselves (Lieblich et al. 1998; McAdams 2001; Neimeyer and Metzler 1994). McAdams (2001) argues that a person’s identity takes a form of a story where the story consists of scenes, characters, plot and themes. Further, people tend to reconstruct the past and identify the present so they can anticipate the future based on the narrative of self.

McAdams (2001) states that the abovementioned ‘meaning system’ can be divided into two themes, agency and communion, which is two fundamental modalities in our existence. Additionally, these two themes accounts for all motion and change in an individual’s life. The two themes have four different sub themes. The four agency themes are: *Self-mastery*, *status/victory*,

*achievement/responsibility and empowerment. The four communion themes are: Love/friendship, dialogue, caring/help and unity/togetherness.*

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Agency theme</b>        | <b><i>Agency theme involves the importance of the self and the existence as an individual. Agency manifests itself in self-expansion, aloneness, self-protection and the urge to master.</i></b>   |
| Self-mastery               | <i>Self-mastery describes the individuals strives to master, control and perfect the self. This is closely related to self-awareness and the self-understanding that entails the realization of goals in life. Ex.: A football player experiences power and mastery during a match.</i>  |
| Status/victory             | <i>Status/victory describes the situation when an individual attains status or prestige among others for instance through honor and recognition. Ex.: A football player receives the award for being the best player of the year.</i>  |
| Achievement/responsibility | <i>Achievement/responsibility describes the individual's success in the achievement of jobs, tasks or in other important responsibilities. Tends to leads to the feelings of being proud, confident, successful or accomplished. Ex.: A manager meets the annual goal for the company.</i>   |
| Empowerment                | <i>Empowerment describes the individual as enlarged, enhanced or empowered through the association with someone or something larger than the self. Often associated with religion. Ex.: An individual feels empowered through contact with a guru or spiritual guide.</i>  |
| <b>Communion theme</b>     | <b><i>Communion theme involves the importance of being a part of something with other individuals and the sense of being with others. Communion includes psychological and motivational ideas involving love, intimacy, sharing, belonging, union, etc.</i></b>  |
| Love/friendship            | <i>Love/friendship describes the individual's feelings of love and friendship. The theme refers primarily to love between two equal individuals, not parent/child. Ex.: Friends feel emotionally closer after spending a summer together. An individual proposes to his/her partner.</i>   |
| Dialogue                   | <i>Dialogue describes the individual's experience of communication or dialogue with another person. Ex.: An individual tells another about his/her challenges and receives advice and are able to develop a two-way conversation.</i>  |
| Caring/help                | <i>Caring/help describes the providing of care, assistance, help, advice or therapy for another person. This can be physical, material, social or emotional. Ex.: Providing help or care for friends, family, co-workers, etc. Develop empathy for other people.</i>   |
| Unity/togetherness         | <i>Unity/togetherness describes the idea of being a part of a larger community. The individual tends to experience the sense of unity, harmony, togetherness and belongingness with a group of people. Ex.: Being accepted, cherished or affirmed. The emphasis on the togetherness in a story with a group of people on a camping trip.</i> |

*Figure 1: agency- and communal themes (McAdams 2001)*

Life stories also transmit cultural meaning as stories are constructed based on building blocks within cultures (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 1998). The narrative, therefore, reflects the values and norms within a certain culture (McAdams 2001). This may be an advantage for using a life story approach because it enables to take into consideration how cultural resources influence leaders sensemaking.

Regarding the image building, life stories can be a good tool to understand leadership emergence, where leaders can use life narratives to establish self-justifications and a good relationship with their followers (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler 2005). Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler (2005) discovered that leaders who learn from previous experiences establish strong social characteristics, such as curiosity and industriousness. Characteristics like curiosity and industriousness can gain self-respect and respect of others, which often are essential in leadership.

## 2.4 Studying formative experiences of leadership

Life events can contribute to leadership development and emergence (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Maitlis 2009). So what type of events can work as triggers for leadership emergence? Unusual and unexpected events that are emotionally evocative often create a deeper impression and provide the basis around which life narratives that are constructed (Brewer 1986). According to McAdams (2001), these events create more personal meaning than others and one can divide important life events into six categories: *originating events*, *turning points*, *anchoring events*, *analogous events*, *redemptive events*, and *contaminating events*.

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Originating events</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Mark the beginning of a new path</i></li> <li>● <i>Often tied to long-term goals</i></li> <li>● <i>Tend to be a plan to meet those goals</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Turning points</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Events that revise a life direction</i></li> <li>● <i>Mark the beginning of a new life plan</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Anchoring events</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Signal what to be valued</i></li> <li>● <i>Signal what to be avoided</i></li> <li>● <i>May lead to revision of ground beliefs and values</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Analogous events</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Triggers a memory of a similar past event</i></li> <li>● <i>Repeated or reinforced earlier life events</i></li> <li>● <i>Reminding a person of what to do or not, based on earlier experiences</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Redemptive events</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Negative events that later are viewed to have a positive influence on their life</i></li> <li>● <i>Tend to have a motivational mechanism</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Contaminating events</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Negative events that later are viewed to have a positive influence on their life</i></li> <li>● <i>Tend to have a motivational mechanism</i></li> </ul>   |

*Figure 2: Subdivision of life events (McAdams 2001)*

Originating events and turning points indicate the beginning of a new life path. For instance, originating events may be linked to the beginning of a new career, where the event is closely connected to long-term goals and a plan to meet those

goals (Pillemer, 2001). A turning point implies a concrete episode that changes the direction of a person's life. A similarity between originating events and turning points is that they both are tied to future goals and acts as motivation for life actions. Anchoring events represent the foundation for a belief system (Pillemer 2001). Mental models operate as reminders of how the world is constructed, and anchoring events signalize which events that should be valued and which events that should be avoided. Such events occur when events of the present activate a memory from the past. The present event has some similarities with past events and lessons learned from the past events will remind the person of what to do, based on previous experiences (Schank 1990). Last, closely related with anchoring events comes analogous events but these are more relevant in later stages of life, when a person has a richer database of experiences. Analogous events act as a reminder, thus, what do or not to do based on earlier experiences.

In the original theory, McAdams (1993) included redemptive- and contaminating events. Redemptive events, or negative events, have showed to have a positive impact on leadership development as they contribute with mental models where negative situations can be turned to something positive. Contrariwise, contaminating events are events that have given the person positive attributes but later created negative consequences and acted as a reminder of failure.

Nevertheless, Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that it is not the events or experiences themselves that contribute to leadership emergence. More importantly, it is crucial how individuals interpret their stories and continuously interpret trigger events. As such, the above-mentioned events may not necessarily impact leadership emergence if the individual do not reflect upon the events. This assumption is based on Ricoeur (1992), who understands the importance of events as a "narrative project", where individuals interpret their actions, events and motivations to create a life story for themselves. The interpretations of the individuals' stories can provide a deeper understanding of what motivates the leadership emergence and further create an understanding of why they may have become leaders.

## 2.5 Studying relational formation of leadership

Relationships are an essential part of our life and are often the reason for why people feel that life is worth living. Every relationship is unique and highly dynamic and may change over time. How do relationships throughout life influence how leaders are formed? And what types of relations are vital? Relations that have imprinted us may emerge from so many different aspects of our life. It can be family members that have given us support, basic values to live by and friends that have challenged and developed us. Further, we may meet other people along the way, sometimes just for a short while, but still make an appearance that stays with us through life.

Understanding life as a story involves highlighting some participants and ignoring others (Josselson and Lieblich 1999). Rae and Carswell (2000) found in their study of entrepreneurs that their relationships were fundamental in their learning and development as entrepreneur and leader. This included role models, parents, friends, business owners, employees, consultants, etc. Researchers have also identified actual life events that contribute leadership emergence (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Maitlis 2009) and much discussion on this has involved early childhood (Campbell 2005). Understanding events, including parent-child relationships and childhood experiences, may therefore be helpful to understand capabilities in leaders and why they became leaders (Aaltio-Marjosola and Lehtinen 1998). Research also argues that the social environment impacts the maturation of structures in the child brain, which again influence behaviour later in life (Snyder and Lopez 2007).

According to Berscheid (1999, p. 261) “. . . *relationships with other humans are both the foundation and the theme of the human condition: We are born into relationships and live our lives in relationships with others.* (In Ragins and Dutton 2006). Despite the importance of relationships, research has traditionally not focused on relationships and not highlighted relations as a significant aspect of organizational life (Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek 2000, Kahn 1993, Ragins and Dutton 2006, Dutton and Ragins 2007). This ignores the significance of organizational relationships, additionally, assumes that people have some type of mechanism to turn off the basic need of relationships when going to work (Ragins and Dutton 2006). Understanding relationships tend to represent meaning in

people's life and may give a deeper understanding of the organizational context (Ragins and Dutton 2006).

The relational turn in social science provide several important resources to the study of leadership as an emergent and social phenomenon. Gergen (2009) provides a general argument on the relational quality of being at large and proposes that all individuals hold to be real, rational and valuable depends on the well-being of their relationships. Thus, it is through individual's relations that individual functioning emerges. Other studies argue that the need of belonging is strong enough to overcome physiological and safety needs (McLeod 2007). Social exchange theory introduces a perspective that propose that humans engage in relations that are rewarding in terms of both in tangible and intangible ways (Emerson 1976, Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). However, social exchange theory treats relationships as means for exchanging resources and uses an economic perspective and fails to address social support and personal growth (Ragins and Dutton 2006). To support this, research suggests that relationships are essential for individuals' ability to develop their sense of self. The rational self is feelings and beliefs that individuals have regarding themselves and are in a high degree influenced by interactions with others (Andersen and Chen 2002). This means that people's emotions and behaviours are formed by both existing and previous relationships. Thus, research argues that events and relationships both affect one's behaviour in interactions with new people and the way you look at yourself (Hinkley and Andersen 1996). Furthermore, Berscheid (1999) proposes that human behaviour occur from context consisting of relationships. According to researchers, relationships can be a useful resource that leads to strong network of supportiveness (Ragins and Dutton 2006; Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek 2000). Ragins and Dutton (2006) address the term positive work relationship and state that relationships at work can contribute to effective development of people as employees feel stronger ties to relationships that contribute to growth and development, rather than organizations itself. This may imply that people throughout life seeks relationships that are growth enhancing, which is interesting as it may explain how people are formed to their present self. Dodgson (1993) also argues that positive relationships help people open up and increase people's cognitive capacities to how approach activities. As such, relationships can contribute to personal and organizational learning.

In contrast to traditional leadership theories on personality and behaviour, we have highlighted literature that proposes that leadership is influenced by leader's life stories. Additionally, that leaders are influenced by events and experiences involving other people, which have affected behaviour, how they make sense of their environment and what they hold to be real. With this as a basis, it leads up to our research question involving leadership as an emergent and relational phenomenon with a life story approach.

### **3.0 Research question**

In response to researchers who argue that personality and context-specific events in the workplace are important in leadership emergence (Bono and Judge 2004, Judge et al. 2002, Riegel 1975, Avolio and Luthans 2006, Avolio 1999), we believe, in compliance with other researchers, that life events can have a great impact on leadership behaviour (Ligon, Hunter, and Mumford 2008, Bluck and Habermas 2000, Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Shamir and Eilam 2005). According to Josselson and Lieblich (1999), life stories can explain how a person is at present, where life stories are used to recount and justify oneself. Whereas many researchers study what makes a good leader, we want to contribute to the literature by studying how leaders use their life experiences to create meaning and how it may have led to emergence of great leadership. One may ask questions like “*why and how have I become a leader?*”. Life stories may provide the answer as humans are social creatures where interactions with other people influence the individuals' behaviour (Insel and Young 2001). Therefore, understanding leadership emergence through formative and relational experiences with a life story approach is an interesting perspective. More specifically, we want to study how life experiences and relations may have an impact on the emergence of leadership. Through our study we have interviewed people that are acknowledged as good leaders within their field of expertise and context. As such, the thesis aim to explore the following question:

***“Which formative and relational life experiences seem particularly significant for leadership emergence?”***

## **4.0 Methodology**

Our aim is to study how life experiences and relations may contribute to leadership emergence through using a method that might give us that insight. The Life Story Interview contributes to give us highly individual and contextual insight that may further give us an understanding of events and relations that are important for a person's development of leadership (Atkinson 1998). The Life Story Interview as method let the interviewees talk about important aspects of their life and further reflect and interpret to understand the deeper meaning. This can help to gain deeper insight on how specific events and relations have had an impact on their way of leading. Atkinson (1998) claim that telling a story about one's life usually is so natural that it may somehow be difficult for people to understand the importance of a single event or relation. However, using this method can facilitate for reflections on how events and relations may have formed the interviewees to the leader they are today and their leadership emergence.

### **4.1 The Life Story Interview**

Traditionally, research on leadership has been focusing on specific traits, personality and context-specific events, which tends to be in work contexts. However, during the 1980s the field of personality psychology began to raise their sight beyond the narrowly defined traits and aspects of the personality (McAdams 2001). Research started to look across personality, motivation, achieving goals, the dynamics of human behaviour, and bits and pieces of the role of life narrative in understanding people's lives (McAdams 2001). When researchers turned to people's lives, they found that narratives and life stories are particular useful in understanding the coherence and the meaning of lives (McAdams 2001). Therefore, researchers have argued that storytelling is crucial in the life story interview, whereas the life story is giving direction, validates the storyteller's experiences and contributes to strengthen community bonds (Atkinson 1998). Further, one's life story does not tell us what happened in the specific event, but more interestingly why it was important and what it means for the person. It says something about who the person will become and what will happen next (McAdams 1993). According to Atkinson (1998, p. 8), a life story can be defined as

*“The story a person chooses to tell about the life he has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another”*

Atkinson (1998) claims that life stories can provide an understanding of the context one is in. Further, Bruner (1986) states that life narratives can contribute to the learning of how we construct our lives. Our aim is to see how leaders make sense of different central life elements, events and beliefs and how leaders may emerge from these experiences. We want to understand how leaders create value based on their stories. Using life story interviewing, a greater emphasis is on personal narratives and the interviewees’ own experiences without asking too direct questions (Atkinson 1998). We live life forward, but understand it backwards. People tend to share experiences that have led to the present (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005). We therefore asked questions to let the interviewee interpret and elaborate on how they made sense of experiences throughout life. This may have enabled us to gain insight in certain experiences and relations that may have been particularly formative for leadership emergence.

## **4.2 Research design and data collection**

It was important for us to gain insight in experiences and events that have been significant for the interviewees’ development as leaders. As such, we had an emphasis on context and more specifically how certain life events have unfolded over time. To do so, we used life story interviews as a foundation; since the design may contribute to the understanding on how our interviewees have emerged as leaders. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), a life story interview contributes to place experiences into sequences, which can result in rich indexical statements of personal experiences. This is in line with the objective of the study, linking important events together can facilitate for the identification of connections on how life events contribute to leadership emergence.

## **4.3 Interviews**

McAdams (2001) argues that life stories are personal and represent essential parts of a personality. However, life stories may also tell us why they behave and act as they do, how they became who they are and indicate their future development. As of this, we designed the interview in a way that enabled the interviewee to reflect

and tell their life story without interruptions. The goal was to let the interviewee tell their story on their own terms and let them include events that they think have been essential for their emergence.

To keep a structure and guide the interviews in a direction that helped us gain relevant information, we made an interview guide that is presented in appendix 11.1. The guide consists of central topics regarding the aim of our study. It was designed to highlight life narratives that have been essential for how the interviewees have formed as humans, which may be connected to their leadership emergence. It was created on the basis of the theoretical framework of our study, combined with general curiosity about events the interviewees have considered as important for their leadership emergence. We started asking the interviewees about their position, education and work tasks to get more insight in what type of role they have in the organization. From this, we decided to ask what type of events and experiences they think have been significantly important for how they have formed to the leader they are today. Doing so contributed to start a reflection process so we could more easily ask follow-up questions based on highlighted events. Furthermore, to ensure insight on how relations have formed the interviewees we formed questions around important people in their lives and more specifically how these people have influenced them. We formed the questions to be open ended as this facilitate for the interviewees' own reflections involving their sensemaking of events. Additionally, open-ended questions allowed us to ask follow-up questions where it was relevant.

Our questions were asked differently according to context and setting of the interview as the interviews were semi-structured and only made to function as a template. In other words, we used semi-structured interviews, which are according to Greenhalgh, Russell, and Swinglehurst (2015) appropriate through a narrative approach since it creates better foundation for insight in individual experiences.

#### **4.4 Data sample**

In total we conducted twelve interviews on different management levels and organizations. A few of the interviewees worked in the same organization but the majority of our sample was divided among different organizations. We chose this to collect data from a diverse set of contexts and people whom we believe strengthen our findings, as they are not context-specific. Further, we also

interviewed two from a sports organization. We believe this gave us a diverse and interesting sample from different contexts. The reason why we conducted some interviews from a sports organization is because leaders and coaches within sports team is often known to be good leaders as they manage to create competitive and strong teams. Of the twelve interviewees, two were females. On average, each interview lasted for one hour and we got the impression that they generally were open and willing to tell stories and reflect upon them. To gain more in-depth information we informed the interviewees in advance the purpose of the study and asked if they could reflect around events that may have had an impact.

#### **4.5 Choice of method**

We considered qualitative methodology as appealing since we aimed to understand leadership emergence through using a life story approach. Kvale (1996) proposes qualitative interview as “*wandering with the interviewee*”, where the interviewer is a traveling companion that tries to understand the interviewee’s story of the “lived world” (p.4). Furthermore, qualitative method wants to capture the respondent’s cognitive and emotional view of the world (Bryman and Bell 2015, Fog 2004). Qualitative method is a broad term and our methodology had a narrative approach. Narrative approach is a recognized method of enquiry since it facilitates for the interviewees to tell their own personal history and give crucial insight in how their personal development as a process has changed them (Greenhalgh, Russell, and Swinglehurst 2015). This is in line with our focus as we aim to study if and how personal experiences and developmental processes influence each interviewee’s leadership emergence.

Through the use of a narrative approach to understand life stories, we wanted to understand each interviewee’s leadership emergence through stories of their life. This biographical perspective let the interviewees retell their experiences from past and previous time and how they dealt with these experiences (Miller 2000). The approach may give us insight in differences and similarities between the interviewees that we used to discover how life stories impact leadership emergence, and how the leaders made sense of their experiences.

## 4.6 Data analysis

The narrative approach tries to construct a chronological story of events and actions to better understand what data to focus on and what data not to focus on (Greenhalgh, Russell, and Swinglehurst 2015). Furthermore, a narrative approach let us draw meaning from different sources and further see links between the different experiences. Life narratives may tell us why people behave and act, how they became who they are, and who they are on their way of becoming (McAdams 2001). To analyze our data we used 'illustrative tales' which aim to use life events to illustrate and identify links between lessons learned and emerged behaviour as a result of the event or experience. We did this with a focus on the leadership emergence.

The life story approach that we chose consists of the interviewees' descriptions, explanations and interpretations of events throughout life that reflects their personal meaning making of previous experiences. First, we read and re-read the transcripts from the interview and tried to identify major themes and similarities between the storyteller's stories. This was done in an iterative manner until we did not identify other major themes. As a result of this, we identified four interesting themes that we believe tell how experiences have led to and formed the interviewees to the leaders they are today. The four categories we ended up with are: *getting people oriented through teams, using struggles as sources of growth, taking responsibility for progression, and appropriating and channeling voices*. After identifying the four categories we examined them further to gain deeper understanding for why we came to these themes. As a result, we recognized key tensions in events in each category. Furthermore, we have used McAdams' (2001) concern for agency- and communal theme as a theoretical basis in this thesis as it includes both the individual- and the relational perspective that we aim to cover. Interestingly, we were able to uncover that the categories and the events include elements of both agency- and communion themes. Musson (1998, 16) states, "*it is the researcher's task to draw from life history narratives the principles on which the stories are founded, not the task of the story teller*". We therefore chose to not limit ourselves to the interviewees' interpretations connected to how they have formed as leaders through their experiences. We, however, included analysis of experiences and relations that we think tells something about their leadership emergence.

To summarize and clarify, we analyzed each of the interviews separately as a series of events and influences over time and then identified and built categories across interviews. Since we cannot include every event or series of events we decided to highlight experiences that were typical and illustrating for the influence of sequences of events or one single event across the interviews. This is in line with Kohler-Reissman (2000), who highlighted this as essential to identify how events are connected to development over time.

#### **4.7 Considerations**

All participation in the study was voluntary. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and because of this we have used aliases to make the interviewees anonymous. The interviews were recorded to minimize the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations. After we had conducted and analyzed the interviews we deleted the recordings.

Through our narrative approach we have aimed for deeper truths of the storyteller's lives, however, a limitation can be that we as interviewers control the outcome rather than capturing the phenomenon of emotional and emergent moments. Before starting the interview process, we knew it could be difficult to create trust between the interviewer and the interviewee, as life events that have had an impact could potentially be personal. As such, we were afraid that the participants were not willing to share meaningful information that could be essential for our study. After conducting the interviews, we still do not know if essential information has been left out. However, the information we gained was relevant for our study and all participants highlighted how interesting the interviews were and that they wanted to share their experiences.

The interviews were gathered through our network of people working with leaders and companies' human resources department. This can be seen as a limitation as it can create restriction in the variation among the interviewees. However, all of our interviewees have been acknowledged as good leaders by others, something that was an important criterion for our study on how they have emerged as leaders.

## 5.0 Meeting the interviewees

Below we have in a short manner presented our interviewees to establish a better understanding of who they are, their most significant experiences and how these are related to key tensions and dynamics between agency- and communal themes. The table is divided into four columns, *what do they do*, *highlighted experiences*, *key tensions* and *dynamics between agency- and communal theme*.

|                | <b>What do they do?</b>   | <b>Highlighted experiences</b>   | <b>Key tensions</b>   | <b>Agency-communion dynamics</b>   |
|----------------|---|--|---|--|
| <b>MIKAEL</b>  | Runs a real-estate business that develops and manages commercial properties. His tasks involve all aspects of the business, such as planning of projects and the everyday management of the buildings. Educated as a civil engineer within construction.  | Sports have been highlighted as something that have formed him as a person, where being competitive and result oriented have been essential. Further, during Mikael's childhood his father was important for his personal development and development of interpersonal skills. Through sports, Mikael learned from his father how to organize, prepare and systematize. This based on his father's pedagogical ways of teaching. | As a result of constantly challenging himself through the competitive environment when being an active athlete may be highlighted as the key tension as this can be linked to the drive to reach goals and taking responsibility for own progress. Further, Mikael received support and guidance from his father. The relationship can also be recognized as a key tension. | Doing individual sports have led to the feelings of self-mastery, achievements and taking responsibility. However, lessons learned through key persons, such as his father, gave him the focus on the unity and how to make a group function.  |
| <b>WILLIAM</b> | Works in a Norwegian marine geophysical company, which provide services that oil companies can use to easier find oil and gas reserves. His main tasks occur around Human Resources and he is a part of the corporate management as a senior vice president. Educated master of science in economics and business administration. | William highlighted the importance of mentors and former relations for his leadership emergence. Furthermore, he has worked with development-oriented tasks, something he state has matured him over several years.  | His experience with mentors shows how relationships and learning outcomes from the mentor relationships are a key tension for William. Further, the opportunity to work with development-oriented tasks highlights the aspects of taking responsibility and developed a drive to reach goals.   | We recognize how the communion theme and more specifically the importance of dialogue have had an impact on Willam's self-mastery and leadership emergence, through his relationships with mentors.  |
| <b>NOORA</b>   | Noora works for a municipality outside of Oslo. Responsible for all school nurses in the municipality. She has studied nursing but also organizational and administrative studies to strengthen her position as a leader.   | The nurse education has formed Noora to become caring as it involves taking care of people. By becoming a manager, she has used her experiences of being the oldest of four sisters to act more responsible. Furthermore, her split up with her ex-partner has formed her to be stronger and more focused on doing what is right for her in her personal and working life.   | Her split-up shows how struggles have been a key tension that has made her stronger. Further, being the oldest of four siblings may show signs of drive and taking responsibility.  | Based on her background as a nurse we believe this have had an impact on Noora's meaning making by focusing on how she can care and help others. Furthermore, this may have had an impact on her self-mastery by being more concerned with how she wants other to perceive her and be a leader that supports, rather than controls the department. |

|                |  |   |  |   |
|----------------|--|---|--|---|
| <b>AKSEL</b>   | <p>Manager in a consulting firm that sells services and solutions within business counselling, IT and application management.</p> <p>Responsible for three major units with 200 employees and a turnover around NOK 250-300 million.</p>                     | <p>Aksel's experiences have contributed to his fearless attitude. Experiences that have contributed to this are, among others, a troubled childhood where his parents did not take a lot of responsibility for him, moving alone as sixteen and always have to take care of himself.</p>  | <p>The key tension in Aksel's life story is concerned with finding meaning through struggles and they have made him stronger and more responsible. Through understanding Aksel's difficult childhood we can link his life story to the drama "the battle" as Aksel compete with himself and tries to prove that he managed to get where he wanted to despite his past. The drama "The battle" is relevant as he has had a troubled childhood where he had the feeling that he needs to prove what he can do.</p> | <p>Through establishing his own consulting business and taking responsibility for himself during his childhood we see the dynamic between agency- and communal theme as achievement/responsibility have led to higher self-mastery. Furthermore, being alone during his childhood has created a feeling of wanting to be a part of something, thus the unity.</p>   |
| <b>NIKOLAI</b> | <p>Works in the consulting industry and manages 180 consultants, where they mostly operate with end-customers for major companies in Norway. He has had a long career within IT, and currently finishing his bachelor degree in Business Administration.</p> | <p>Nikolai had a father who was career-focused, he states that his father's mind-set has created an underlying expectation that Nikolai also should achieve something. Further, Nikolai and his family moved a lot during his childhood, something that resulted in Nikolai had to make new friends several times. Moving a lot has impacted him to easier deal with different situations and being adaptable to new environments. He further state that through experiencing both good and bad leaders he has become more aware of what kind of leader he wants to be.</p> | <p>The experience of moving several times shows how the concern of being a part of a unity have been a key tension, e.g. trying to adapt to new environments. Furthermore, how he copies values and leadership behaviours may be related to "voices".</p>  | <p>Through copying some elements and ignoring others from previous and current leaders, we see how Nikolai creates a meaning system through striving to master the self, thus the self-mastery theme. As he is referring to himself as a "people-person" we believe that his way of striving to master the self has an impact on how he wants to be perceived by people and therefore have an emphasis on communication and caring for his employees. The experience of moving several times has also made him realise the importance of the unity.</p> |
| <b>SUSAN</b>   | <p>Captain of an elite handball team in Norway. She has played handball for 20 years and has been the team's captain for the last 6 years.</p>   | <p>Susan emphasized the importance of being part of a team. She started playing handball because many of her friends did so and she wanted to fit in. Since she now is the captain of the team she highlighted the importance of being inclusive towards everyone on the team.</p>  | <p>Key tensions in Susan's case is concerned with being a part of a team and achieve results together with the team, which is an important factor for her position as captain of the handball team.</p>  | <p>Being a part of a handball team highlights the concern for unity/togetherness and how Susan has found meaning by being a part of this team. However, being in a competitive environment has also led to a focus on self-mastery</p>  |

|               |  |   |   |  |
|---------------|--|---|---|--|
| <b>TIM</b>    | Tim is the head coach of an elite handball team in Norway. His tasks are concerned around planning their training and analyse matches so the athletes can improve their skills. He has been a handball coach for 25 years and he started his career as coach when he was 18 years old.   | Due to an injury Tim got while he was playing, he started his career as a handball coach. It was not a major injury but because of this he got the opportunity to start training a team. His knowledge and experience from handball has been closely linked with his passion for handball and he has learned a lot through handball education and courses.  | Similar to Susan, constantly challenging himself together with the team may be highlighted as the key tension. Additionally, the desire to develop his theoretical and practical handball skills and the passion of the game have been crucial, which can be related to the initiator role and the drive to reach goals.  | Same as Susan, the concern for unity/togetherness is crucial, but also achievement as he aims to lead and support the handball team in the best way that he can and his interest in constantly master the theoretical aspects of handball better.  |
| <b>ROBERT</b> | Robert works with property development and is responsible for certain portfolios with real estates. His main tasks are to make sure that all projects are going smoothly and the management of the properties are done right. He has studied engineering.                                | Robert highlighted his stepfather as an important person for how he has formed as a leader. His stepfather was a calm person and they created an open and strong relationship. With this relationship, Robert has copied some of his stepfather's calming sides and tries in his everyday working life to be open towards new people.   | Key tensions in Robert's life story are highlighted in the relation with his stepfather, where we see the importance of having a role model or someone to look up to. Through Robert's storytelling we got the impression that his drama was two folded. During his leadership emergence he was first concerned about "the battle", how to compete, do everything himself and to win. However, during his time as a leader we have recognized a development where he has become more concerned about the mission, thus how to do well and how to be open and inclusive. | Dialogue is essential for Robert as he became more open through his relationship with his stepfather. As Robert first described himself as one that liked to do everything himself but have later understood the importance of sharing and working together. Robert have become more self-aware and used this insight to increase his self-mastery. However, his self-awareness has also impacted the communal themes by better understand the importance of dialogue and unity. |
| <b>ERIC</b>   | Works as a manager in a consultancy firm and is in charge of all business consulting for the company's departments in Scandinavia. His responsibility is to make sure that everything works out well in all the departments and contributes to establish new departments in Scandinavia. | Being close to his grandfather who was a farmer has taught Eric to have a mind-set where hard work pays off. He got a lot of responsibility as a kid when he helped his grandfather on the farm. During his childhood he saw how much work his grandfather put into the farming and he has used this mind-set in his role as manager. He has further understood the importance of motivation and how different things motivate people. As such, he is not afraid to give differential treatment regarding what motivates his employees. | Similar to Robert, we see the benefits of having someone to look up to and to be challenged by. Essential in Eric's story is his relationship with his grandfather and the mind-set on being hardworking. Key tensions for Eric are therefore both the concern of voices and taking responsibility.   | Getting a lot of responsibility through his childhood we can understand how the agency theme and more specifically achievement/responsibility have influenced Eric. As Eric is strongly convinced that different treatment is crucial for getting people motivated we can link this to the communal theme and caring/help as he provide assistance and motivates his employees differently based on what they get motivated by.  |

|               |  |   |  |   |
|---------------|--|---|--|---|
| <b>MARTIN</b> | Martin works in the construction industry where he is managing director for a construction company. They are 20 people working at the company's office, and the rest of the employees are working on projects around in Norway. Educated as an engineer.   | Through having troubles with sickness during his childhood, Martin understood the importance of taking care of people around him as he recognized the importance through his time at the hospital and saw how much the nurses and doctors took care of him. As such, through his time as a manager he has always been concerned about having an other-oriented attitude and an understanding of how everyone in the firm is contributing to organizational success. | We believe Martin's key tensions are concerned with taking care of others, thus we recognize the drama "the other" in Martin's life story. He does not want to be excluding towards people and aim to contribute to developing others. Also, the importance of taking on an initiator role for himself but also for the employees is central through Martin's stories.   | We believe Martin's meaning system is much based on the communal theme and more specifically the caring/help themes and the achievement/responsibility themes. This because he has shown great interest in helping others but also that he is an initiator where he manages to achieve great results on the organization's behalf. However, his focus on caring and helping others has also resulted in self-mastery, for instance by getting the opportunity to work in a higher position in the organization. |
| <b>HENRIK</b> | Works within the construction industry and is responsible for all tasks in the Oslo department. After he graduated as a civil engineer he started in the company he works for now, thus he has been in the same organization for 22 years. Educated as an engineer.  | Henrik emphasized that the company he works for has made him the manager he is today. He has stayed in the same company since he graduated as a civil engineer due to the company's values and beliefs. He feels that being a part of the company has made him being more concerned with the importance of good values. He further started working as a carpenter at the age 15, something he stated was a very tough start on his working career                   | Based on highlighted experiences we see the concern for the drama through "The mission" as Henrik want to do well and emphasize the good values and culture the company contain. The concern for keeping and being part of an organization with good values can be related to being a part of a team and achieve results together with others.   | As Henrik highlighted the importance of facilitating for others' growth we can see how the concern for caring/help is important for him. Furthermore, he has stayed with the same organization for all his working years due to the values, which can symbolize the importance of values that contribute to caring, helping and working together as a unity.  |
| <b>THOMAS</b> | Educated civil engineering from NTNU and is currently working within the construction industry. He is a department manager where he is in charge of four construction projects. His main task is to make sure that the projects are running successfully. Additionally, he works towards finding new projects for the company. | Thomas' parents built and redecored mostly themselves something Thomas stated that got him interested in creating, building and construction. He learnt a lot of basic carpentry. Interest in carpentry and construction has made him a leader that has expertise within the construction field, something he states is important to receive respect, support and dignity from his employees.   | Based on interest for construction and carpentry, we can see how this have led to a drive to reach goals and take responsibility and be successful in his team. This interest has been influenced from childhood voices something that underline the importance of childhood relations. As he has stated the importance of understanding the industry and basic of construction he shows signs of taking responsibility. | Wanting to keep improving as a leader can show how Thomas' work challenges his self-mastery. He wants to use his construction skills together with leadership tools. We can also see how the communal theme has impacted his self-mastery by learning about carpentry from an early age. His interests in construction came through dialogue and given responsibility from his parents and the self-mastery has grown from this and later experiences.  |

Figure 3: Introduction to the storytellers

## 6.0 Findings and discussion

Our analysis resulted in identification of four interesting categories that we believe show what and how experiences have formed the interviewees to become the leaders they are today. The four categories are: *getting people oriented through teams*, *using struggles as sources of growth*, *taking responsibility for progression*, and *appropriating and channeling voices*. The categories are defined below. We make no claim that these themes are an exhaustive list but instead recurrent themes throughout the interviews. The four categories are rather complementary and may be intertwined. Furthermore, the recounted stories may include elements of several categories at once.

| <b>Category</b>                                     | <b>Definition</b>   | <b>Key tensions</b>  | <b>Agency-communion dynamics</b>  | <b>Typology</b>  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| <b><i>Getting people oriented through teams</i></b> | The category refers to experiences and events where being a part of a team led to interviewees getting aware of how they want to treat people around them. The category implies that something is at stake. It means that one may feel that something is at stake in terms of being scared of getting left out of a team or experiences where the overall objective may be threatened if the team is not functioning. | The key tension in this category involves the feeling that something is at stake in terms of both personally such as being scared of not fitting in and not reaching goals as a group. <i>Ex. Achieving goals together with others, winning a handball match together with a team, being excluded from a group</i> | This category is a typical communion theme as it represents teamwork, how people work together towards a goal and how everyone has their function in a group. Even though the stories typically can be related to communion, it may be identified agency theme in terms of their learning, e.g. the feeling of self-mastery and responsibility. | The events in this category can typically be seen as a turning point or an anchoring event (McAdams 2001). For instance, a moving event where one may feel left out may represent a turning point as it can give a new direction in life. Further, achieving goals together with others may represent an anchoring event as it can strengthen the perception of what to be valued. Additionally, the category may also represent elements of appropriating and channeling voices of learning involving how to behave towards others. |
| <b><i>Using struggles as sources of growth</i></b>  | Central in this category are negatively charged experiences that have led to personal development. When experiencing difficult times, the processing influence how one makes sense of the experience. For instance, it is easier to get a positive outlook and learn from the situation later on by taking charge of the situation, which also tend to symbolize independence and standing on one's own two feet.     | The key tension in struggles is the initial negatively charged experiences across the interviewees, which they have used to their advantage and learned from them. <i>Ex. Lack of support from people around you, divorce, bad health.</i>   | The agency theme is central in this category as it involves personal struggles and challenges in life. Giving the stories a deeper look one may recognize elements of communion theme, e.g. taking care of one's brother and create a stronger bond or keeping one's children in mind when going through a divorce.                             | The events in this category can typically be seen as both redemptive- and anchoring events. Redemptive as the stories are negatively charged events that have resulted in positive outcomes. Anchoring as the negatively charged events have signaled what to be valued. Additionally, the category may also represent elements of appropriating and channeling voices of learning involving responsibility, independence and hard work.   |

|  |   |   |  |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p><b><i>Taking responsibility for progression</i></b></p> | <p>This category is concerned with events where one has showed the ability to take action for the progression of one’s objectives. Objectives in this context may be both one’s personal or organizational goals and getting things done. For instance, be proactive and not waiting for something to happen (e.g. start their own business if one does not get a job).</p>   | <p>The commonality across the stories is the drive of setting goals and being proactive to reach those goals. Taking responsibility to do the necessary steps. <i>Ex. Taking responsibility for own learning and development, being an initiator on the organization’s behalf.</i></p>  | <p>The agency theme is also central in this category as it implies that everyone takes responsible for his or her own development and progression. Communion themes may be detected between the lines, as the stories tend to involve how the action may contribute into a group or a context on work that involves other people.</p>                                | <p>The events in this category can typically be seen as originating events as it tends to mark the beginning of a new path. Interestingly, this category indicates that people can initiate to create their own paths. In other words, the originating events are initiated by the involved individual. Additionally, the category may also represent elements of appropriating and channeling voices of learning involving responsibility, independence and hard work.</p> |
| <p><b><i>Appropriating and channeling voices</i></b></p>   | <p>Events in this category emphasize experiences where “voices” or memories of lessons learned emerge in situations from valued people and relations. This can for instance be family, mentors, previous/current leaders, etc., which have taught them lessons that have influenced their behaviour. Whereas events may influence behaviour through how individuals make sense of the event, the category leadership emergence through the influence of voices are referring to how individuals make sense of relationships where one may adopt desired and valued behaviour.</p> | <p>The tension in this category involves relations that have resulted in life lessons where their “voices” emerge in situations where the lessons learned are applicable. The voices are used as guidance in situations. <i>Ex. Family members, learning and understanding values from others, mentors, previous leaders.</i></p> | <p>This category is a typical communion theme as it involves present or previous relations in the interviewees’ life, however, the agency themes are highly relevant as the learning from the voices tends to involve both how to behave towards others or qualities with an emphasize on the individual, e.g. responsibility, work hard to achieve one’s goals.</p> | <p>The events tend to involve appropriation and channeling of voices involving especially family members, such as parents, grandparents, siblings, etc., previous and present leaders and mentors from early in their working careers.</p>  |

Figure 4: Main findings

The identification of key tensions, the presence of both agency- and communion themes, and the typology in terms of developmental events represent our main findings (Figure 4). These findings underline the complexity of an event and how different individuals reflect and make sense of their life events. The individual's meaning system are quite different, however, there are some commonalities between the different stories in how the interviewees have found meaning in events and how they have contributed to their leadership emergence. Our findings provide a contribution as the dynamics between agency- and communion themes shows the importance of relations and the social interplay in leadership emergence. Moreover, our findings also give a comprehensive picture on how social contexts and interplays may lead to individual qualities such as taking responsibility for own progress and being concerned for increasing self-mastery. Additionally, findings indicate that one can initiate one's development, which further can lead to leadership emergence. Finally, this research expands the theory on leadership emergence through life narratives by addressing the importance of reflection and interpretation of life events, in other words how sensemaking of events can lead to emergence of leadership.

The empirical analysis revealed patterns of sequences over time, where series of similar events and experiences have led to growth and leadership behaviours that have emerged over time. We have chosen to highlight stories that are typical for these sequences and discussed them accordingly. The recounted stories may include elements that are relevant of several categories. In order to avoid any confusion, we will treat the categories separately, however, a summarizing section on the interrelation across the categories is provided in the end of the discussion chapter.

The life story approach, when studying leadership as an emergent and relational phenomenon, suggests that it is essential how the interviewees make sense of their self-knowledge, self-concept and their environment. Reflective thinking may be defined as *“the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective”* (Boyd and Fales 1983, 99). The process involves returning to events in their lives that have been significant in terms of their role as leader, reflect on how and why they did as they did, re-evaluate and reflect on what the learning outcomes were. The interviews

were designed to be able to touch upon these reflections, it has enabled us to get insights about their strengths, weaknesses, motives and values that may have contributed to their leadership emergence. Further, reflective processes on life events can occur both close in time to the event but also in later stages in life. This may therefore give us valuable insights on how the interviewees reflect on the experiences both close to the events but also how they look back on the events and reflect on the importance of events for their current leadership behaviour. Additionally, we believe self-development are closely related to leader emergence and may therefore provide some explanations why some people emerge as leaders.

Across the conducted interviews, we have recognized that the events are closely related to McAdams' (2001) agency- and communal themes, which argues that these two themes are the two central superordinate thematic clusters in people's life. This coding system is designed to identify the salience of agency- and communion themes in specific life events. We have therefore used agency- and communion themes as basis in the discussion of this thesis.

### **6.1.1 Getting people oriented through teams**

The category "*getting people oriented through teams*" addresses the concern of experiences and events where being a part of a team have led to awareness of how to treat people. The category implies that something is at stake, which means that one may feel that something is at stake in terms of being scared of getting left out of a group or experiences where the overall objective may be threatened if the team is not functioning.

Stories of how the interviewees learned how to treat people and essentially how they became more people-oriented tended to emerge when talking about teams or groups. Additionally, such stories seemed to occur many times through life, which may imply that these stories are examples of sequences of events that have led them to getting more people-oriented. However, we have chosen to highlight events that have been typical for the sequence. Some stories involved how the interviewee wanted to fit in and be a part of a social context, thus the concern for not fitting in. Other stories involved how a group of people was part of a comprehensive picture where everyone had their role in the process to achieve a

goal or making sure everyone felt included in a group. One commonality across the stories is that they all got more aware of how they wanted to treat people.

During the interviews all storytellers recounted stories that described situations where fitting in and being part of a team or a group was central. The common feature throughout these stories was that the events had influenced how they wanted to take on the leadership role and how to treat people. A few interviewees told stories from their early life where they had to change environment.

“I was 12 years old when me and my family moved. I came from a place where I knew everyone and then my parents decided to move. I was in shock. It was a disaster. I didn’t want to move! (...) I had to do something to socialize so I joined the scouts, the swimming team and started doing karate. I wanted to be accepted and fit into the new social environment. (...) It is very important for me to fit in. Being a part of something bigger. I feel sick when I see people getting left out. I don’t like it, and I have to deal with it right away. I know how it feels to not being a part of a social group. Being including is important.” [Martin]

“(...) I had to change school four times because of my father’s work situation. I think the change of schools have formed me as a leader in terms of being able to deal with a lot of different situations, fit into a new environment, interact with new people and in a way find my place in different contexts. I am adaptable in different situations. I have to be able to associate with people. If I figured out in an early age that I were not able to find a way to work with different people and adapt to my surroundings it would be hard to have a people-oriented job as this.” [Nikolai]

These stories were highlighted as events that influenced the interviewees’ concern of taking care of others. The feeling of not belonging have led to not wanting others to experience the same feeling, which can be related to empathy.

Additionally, the stories may be a sign of their ability to adapt to new environments and social roles.

Most interviewees also highlighted stories that involved the comprehensive picture and how other people have a specific role in a team. Aspects that were particularly interesting was that they emphasized that as a leader they have to be comfortable with treating people differently because of differences among people and their role in the particular group. Further, the stories emphasized how they were committed to find the right roles, positions or responsibilities that were compatible with the different individuals within a group. The fact that everyone

contributes to an overall picture was an important aspect of the interviewees' roles as leaders.

“(…) I once was asked to take over a project. There was a project manager and an architect that had to work together. My role was to manage the process and be in charge for the whole project. When I got in charge the problem was that the project manager and the architect had extremely bad communication and as a result they didn't do their job properly and our customer got nervous for the project's outcome. In addition, the project manager didn't manage the project. He wasn't able to give tasks to the right people. It seemed like he didn't have the skills to lead. (...) For me, it's important to be a part of the team. Everyone has to do their part of the work and we shall do it together. If a member of the team doesn't do their job, the rest of the team have to step up and make sure to help and support. Leadership involves people and we have to find the right composition of a team.” [Aksel]

“I think my first memory of taking on a leader role was when I was in the scouts. (...) After a while I became group leader for one of the scout troops. There were approximately 30 kids in the troop. My job was to get the troop to pitch the tents, paddle the canoes in the right direction and delegate other tasks. In addition, make sure everyone in the group had a good time.” [Nikolai]

The stories emphasized how everyone in a group or team had a function to the overall picture and further how to find the right positions or tasks for everyone. The interviewees wanted everyone to do their job but also make sure everyone had a good experience.

“(…) I think it's very important to treat people different based on who they are. Different things motivate people. Everyone do different jobs, have different personalities and behave differently. I therefore think as a leader you should treat people accordingly.” [Robert]

This is an example on a recurrent statement all interviewees provided, which also reflects the importance of understanding that people need to be treated differently based on their personality, position, responsibilities and motivation.

### **6.1.2 The role of getting people oriented through teams**

Illustrated in the findings table the key tension of this category is the presence of the feeling that something is at stake. Both in terms of being scared of not fitting in or not reaching goals together as a group. In contrast to Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005), our findings imply a higher degree of consciousness around the importance of other people and relationships (Gergen 2009, Andersen and Chen 2002, Hinkley and Andersen 1996). People are social creatures and it is interesting that the social aspect of leadership is not included beyond the leader-follower relationship. Further, even though this category can be a typical communion theme, there are also elements of agency themes for instance through the feeling of mastery and responsibility. Again, the findings imply that the social interplay may not only be important for the unity but also to the development of qualities that involves the individual. Arguably, being with others, developing friendships and units may naturally foster the communion themes such as love and togetherness, however, each individual's reflections, awareness and interpretations (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Gardner et al. 2005, Avolio 1999, Gergen 1994) of the communion narratives may result in agency themes, such as responsibility and self-mastery. Further, the interpretation and reflection process may therefore decide which life narratives that are constructed (e.g. originating-, anchoring event). This is a contribution to the literature as it first, present the centrality of relations and the social interplay of leadership and the emergence of leadership. Second, our findings give a more comprehensive picture of the complexity of how a social context is related to qualities involving the self, such as responsibility and self-mastery.

To gain a deeper understanding of the agency- and communion dynamics we return to McAdams (2001). The team orientation that is recurrent in the stories may be seen in the light of McAdams (2001) communal theme because all events involve relationships, the unity and the feeling of belonging and intimacy. For instance, where Martin, Nikolai and Aksel emphasized the need to belong and be a part of the unity. Interestingly, especially Aksel and Nikolai's stories provide an element of agency theory. These are stories where they actively took on a leader role in a team and resulted in a feeling of mastery and responsibility (McAdams 2001).

The experience of moving to a new place, trying to make new friends, fitting in and so on may be challenging and scary, which the storytellers also emphasized. They felt as if something was at stake. All our interviewees underlined that it is important to reflect upon and learn from experiences, additionally, they represented a liking for learning experiences that tends to be a desirable attribute in a leader. Further, McAdams et al. (1996) argue that an agency- and communal theme in our life story accounts for all motion and change, however, openness to learning and new experiences may influence the outcome. Moving to a new place when it is not chosen may represent a way of going out of one's comfort zone. Especially Martin highlighted his frustration at the time of moving from his comfortable life to a new place. However, going out of one's comfort zone may also lead to learning something new about one self. Research suggests that going out of one's comfort zone facilitate for individual growth through reflection upon problem solving and challenging oneself (Brown 2008, Andrews and Delahaye 2000, Luckner and Nadler 1997). Going out of the comfort zone is, however, not necessarily enough for growth and learning. First, one has to be open for learning. Second, reflections and interpretations tend to be essential for the experience to give personal meaning (Avolio 1999, Leberman and Martin 2002). However, our findings imply that these points have been present and have facilitated individual growth through getting proactive and including and caring for other people.

Becker (2007) argues that the main movers of human behaviour are the fear of life (agency) and the fear of death (communal). Even though the statements of McAdams (2001) are milder, our interviewees emphasized in the stories of moving how they felt that their social life was at stake, and may therefore be a good illustration of how the fear of not belonging has a unifying effect.

Naturally, both Martin and Nikolai felt the need of belonging and fitting in at the new place they moved to. They both took a proactive role to establish new relations and a new life. The feeling of wanting to fit in and belonging somewhere is in line with researchers who underline that belonging is a fundamental need for people (McAdams 2001, McLeod 2007). Taking on a proactive role and be responsible for creating a life at a new place may indicate that they actually are open to new experiences and learning, which have been pointed out as crucial for emergence and development of leadership (Avolio 1999, Avolio and Gardner 2005, Gardner et al. 2005, Avolio and Luthans 2006, Gergen 1994, McAdams

2001). Interestingly, the moving experience may have worked as a trigger event for analysis and interpretations, which have led to being open and proactive in the actual event. This may further have fostered the focus on being including, caring and adaptable to one's surroundings which they use every day in their role as leaders.

Another interesting finding was that several of the storytellers described events that evolved around what role they take in a team or a group, where the group also has a certain goal to reach. The similarity across the different stories is that they tend to take a coordinating and caring role, and ensure the cohesion of the group. This consistency throughout the different stories is interesting because it implies that taking such roles are desirable in a leader. Additionally, positive experiences where they took a specific role in an early age may have confirmed their sense of self and behaviour in their interpretation and analyzing process. These two points might have made it easier to emerge as leaders later. Taking on a specific role in a group and especially when one takes a leading role may show elements of agency. It can show elements of agency as one take this role because it is natural to the individual but also because of the urge to get the feeling of mastery and the status that might follow (McAdams 2001). In contrast, the composition of a group or a team may also symbolize communion through the unity of the group. The unity experience may foster the sense of oneness, harmony, togetherness and belongingness, where harmony tends to be closely related to the uniqueness of each individual that fits into an overall picture (McAdams 2001).

Belbin (2012) takes another approach where the stories may show how the interviewees take a social role as a coordinator or a team worker. Furthermore, he argues that people are generally appointed to roles on the basis of their abilities or experiences, which underpins that experiences involving taking a role in a group may lead to emergence of leadership since such behaviour is fairly consistent (Belbin 2012, Fisher, Hunter, and MacRosson 1998). Some of the criticism towards Belbin's team role theory involve the self-reporting of the role one take, and that the role one take is not only influenced by the individual's abilities but also their social learning of roles (Aritzeta, Swailes, and Senior 2007). However, in this context it may be considered as strength as we are essentially studying how leaders make sense of events they have experienced themselves, where it is our

task to highlight how events and experiences may have led to emergence of leadership.

All our interviewees emphasized that it was important to treat people in line with their personality, behaviour and individual differences. This focus has evolved over time from observing, learning from and interacting with previous leaders, role models, friends and family. Furthermore, through a lot of different scenarios involving interactions, the interviewees have figured out that they have to behave differently with people around them to avoid conflicts, create connections, cooperate with people, etc. Their modification of behaviour was in a high degree based on reactions from the involved people, which may be related to Roberts et al. (2005, 715) who argue that people adjust and revise their self-concept and behaviour through observing situational cues and others' responses. Moreover, Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton (2011) describe other-awareness as being aware of other people's characteristics and behaviours and is especially important for providing some context for one's own actions and behaviour. This description may be applicable when turning to how our interviewees describe that they treat people differently. People meet a lot of people throughout life, where all these interactions may lead to being more aware of the people they are interacting with as argued for by Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton (2011). They further found that people who were more aware of others were able to better coordinate their actions.

Martin emphasized early how he feels sick if someone gets left out, which may have emerged from own experiences of fearing to not belong (McAdams 2001). This experience may have made him able to put himself in other people's situations. Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton (2011) describe this as perspective taking. Perspective taking is different from other-awareness as it does not only recognize people's behaviour and internal state, but also tries to imagine mentally how other's experience situations. Interestingly, the represented findings may therefore indicate that several of the skills they use as leaders, which have emerged over time, are related to interpersonal experiences that have led to modification of their own behaviour.

Having discussed the category involving teams, we will now discuss and summarize the role this category may play in leadership as an emerging phenomenon. A recurrent theme acted on experiences where the storytellers became aware of how they wanted to treat people around them, additionally, it was a certain aspect of a tension present (Carlsen 2008, DeRue and Wellman 2009). The fear of not belonging fostered behaviour in terms of being proactive, including, caring and being able to put themselves in other people's situations, which is closely related to how they conduct their role as leaders today. This finding may therefore imply that communal narratives foster desirable leadership features when being open to learning and paying attention to the responses of people around you. Further, we have pointed out that the stories involving a specific role in a team or a group may also represent an element of agency as well as communion. Similar to the findings around struggles, we observe that these stories can foster qualities in terms of seeing needs in a group and fill a role, in addition to the communion behaviours as mentioned above. Interestingly, this finding may imply that communal narratives foster specific behaviour patterns and agency narratives foster qualities within individuals. Moreover, the experiences highlighted here can have led to being proactive, aware of others, taking responsibility for one's own life and the openness to new experiences, which have been pointed at as crucial for emergence and development of leadership.

### **6.2.1 Using struggles as sources of growth**

The category is referring to negatively charged experiences that have led to personal development. When experiencing difficult times, the processing influence how one makes sense of the experience. For instance, it is easier to get a positive outlook and learn from the situation later by taking charge of the situation, which also tend to symbolize independence and standing on one's own two feet.

Everyone experiences challenges and struggles throughout life. The interviewees mentioned challenging events or life situations that have been essential. These events were highlighted as something that have led to a great inspiration to keep working, or have had an importance for how to behave in their leader role.

Further, challenging events were also emphasized as crucial to their development of the self.

For instance, one interviewee recounted a life situation where the interviewee grew up with parents that were not present, which led the interviewee to act more independently. Moreover, where many people would have given up and felt sorry for themselves, the interviewee took responsibility of his own life, from an early age.

“My parents were very young when they got me. My mother turned 20 a few days after I was born and my father was 24. They were young and maybe a bit selfish. I think they were together just because they got me. (...) My childhood was pretty though, I would say. Since my parents had so much focus on themselves, I had to take care of myself from an early age. I figured out early that if I didn’t take charge of the situation, no one else would. Later I became a big brother and I also had to take care of him. (...) As of this, I learnt from a very early age how to stand on my own two feet and make independent decisions.” [Aksel]

Furthermore, the interviewee also highlighted moving out in an early age as important, which again led to taking responsibility of his own situation and development.

“(…) When I started high school I moved out from my parents’ house. I was 16 years old. I had been used to taking care of myself. In addition to that, I have always felt that I have something to prove, so I’ve gotten used to always take charge of different situations, and I like it. (...) I think these milestones have helped me on the way to become the leader I am today, in terms of taking initiative and deal with different challenges.” [Aksel]

We also got insight in a story from an interviewee who was hospitalized over a long period of time during his childhood. The interviewee described this as an event that led him to appreciate things more. Moreover, it helped the interviewee to put life into perspective. Since the interviewee was mostly alone at the hospital, the ability of being alone and take care of himself was underlined as outcomes of the experience. In addition, the experience led to wanting to do and achieve what everyone else managed to, as he lost the ability to do what he wanted due to the hospitalization.

“I was sick a lot when I was young. During a 3 year-period I was often at the hospital. I had to learn how to walk all over again and I think I started to appreciate things a lot more because of that. (...) I was 7 years old, and I was mostly alone when I was at the hospital.

My mom and dad worked far away but they came to visit me every weekend when they didn't work. Because of the circumstances I got pretty independent and I had to take care of myself. It's strange to say, but I kind of got used to it. (...) Being sick and getting used to taking care of myself have led to that I have become more concerned for the people around me and developed an ability to put myself in other people's situations." [Martin]

One interviewee mentioned divorce as a turning point and referred to it as a negative point. The divorce was difficult as the interviewee was not sure if the breakup was the "right" thing to do as they had small children together.

"Our divorce was a turning point in my life and I had many feelings of guilt for moving out. I often asked myself what right I had to do so, regarding the children. But in the end it was important to think about myself and do the right thing. To move out was really for the best, and it made me much stronger, personally. Also, filing for a divorce, the collaboration with my previous partner became much better than it was when we were together (...) The divorce may have helped me to be more understandable in work contexts as well, thus if there are conflicts, how should one solve this and how will the parties involved get the best out of it." [Noora]

Additionally, several interviewees described incidents that gave them inspiration to work harder or use their knowledge in another context. Such incidents could be injuries in sports that instead of breaking them down, it influenced their motivation to keep developing.

"(...) I wasn't seriously injured, but I struggled with my legs and I wasn't able to work out properly. I felt I stagnated and I was pretty frustrated and didn't think it was as fun as it should have been. However, I still thought handball was interesting and I wanted to learn more. When my old coach asked me if I wanted to take over his team, I thought it was a good opportunity to continue with the interest of the game." [Tim]

"I had to go through a surgery when I was 18. I was quickly back on the court, but it kind of sucked as I missed out on the Olympic games for youths. I went down to watch but I would rather be there to play. (...) Missing the Olympics gave a lot of inspiration since I wanted to be a part of it and not miss more big tournaments." [Susan]

The interviewees emphasized that the injuries inspired them to use their knowledge to contribute to the group in a different way. Furthermore, they learnt that everyone in a group have a function and that one can always contribute even though the situation changes, which they later have used in their roles as leaders.

These stories show that the interviewees have struggled or had challenges in life that have influenced their way of behave and think. Some interviewees highlighted stories where they had to take responsibility for themselves and further felt they had to prove something. Others emphasized stories where they appreciated things more after experiencing struggles and further how the events influenced their way of living or used the challenge as an inspiration to further develop the self.

### **6.2.2 The role of using struggles as sources of growth**

The key tension in this category is the initial negatively charged experience, which the interviewees have used to their advantage and further learned from them. This supports research of Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler (2005) who found that struggles have been used of some leaders as a source of growth. Additionally, the outcomes of the experiences are consistent throughout. The events are typical for agency themes as it illustrates how the self get the drive to come through the difficult times, however, in addition to the agency themes the experiences fosters communion themes, e.g. wanting to take care of others and create stronger bonds to their family. This is interesting as it illustrates that people tend to search for the unity. There is no guarantee that challenging situations will turn into positive outcomes, fascinatingly, our findings imply again that the individuals' reflections and interpretations (Avolio and Gardner 2005) decides what type of narrative event it turns into (e.g. originating, redemptive). This is a contribution to the literature as it expands the theory today with addressing how reflections and interpretations, in other words sensemaking, may lead to emergence of leadership. Additionally, our findings show how the sensemaking may turn into outcomes in terms of agency- and communion themes, which may influence leadership emergence.

Again, we can return to McAdams (2001) as the recounted stories about challenging events may be seen in the light of agency themes, where the narratives focus on individual growth. Challenges and struggles throughout life may occur in many different ways and some tougher than others. Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005) found that leaders with challenges early in life tended to emphasize the fact that they came from families with disadvantages, low socioeconomic status or minority ethnic groups, which is also in line with the

represented findings. Aksel told us about his background where his parents acted selfish and did not prioritize the children. As a result, he had to take care of himself and his brother from an early age. The storyteller emphasized, as a result of a tough childhood, that he found the power to win and turn his life around. The power to win may represent both the agency theme of self-mastery and the achievement/responsibility (McAdams 2001), where the storyteller feels proud, confident, masterful and accomplished. Another of our interviewees that experienced the same effect, in terms of finding the power to win, was Martin who was sick for much of his childhood. Moving away from childhood events, another storyteller, Noora, told us how the split-up with her ex-partner impacted her inner strength and further how she understood the importance of doing what is best for herself and for the parties involved (McAdams 2011). Although this is not a challenge that occurred early in life, Noora experienced the same outcome or learning points similar to Aksel and Martin, that Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler (2005) found in their study, such as the power to win, feeling proud and confident.

Like us, several researchers argue that their interviewees learned to stand on their own two feet, be independent and believe in themselves (Shamir and Eilam 2005, Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Turner and Mavin 2008, McAdams 2001, McAdams et al. 1996). Setbacks and tough challenges throughout life was something to overcome and not get defeated by. They developed a sense of confidence that resulted in development of essential attitudes and beliefs that they have used in their role as leader, such as the drive, work ethic, and the awareness of how to treat people.

Interestingly, these events may be seen both as redemptive- and anchoring events. A tough childhood, illness and divorce are events that started off as negative. However, through the interviews it is highlighted several learning points from these experiences, such as being independent, taking care of others and a fundamental belief that they are going to succeed in the things they set their minds to. This may reflect the identity and image they have constructed through analysis, interpretations and reflections around that specific experience (McAdams et al. 1996, Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Bruner 1991, Gergen 1994), and how this identity led to emergence of leadership and formed them to the leaders they are today. Further, these events may be seen in light of anchoring events as they represent both signals of what to be valued and what to be avoided

(McAdams 2001). Aksel's experience taught him to be proactive, work for what he believed in and take care of people. Additionally, the event also gave him signals on avoiding to be like his own parents when raising own children. Further, Martin taught through being ill that it is important to not take things for granted, to understand other people's point of view and as a result of this he has become more aware of how to treat people.

To gain a deeper understanding of how struggles may be related to leadership as an emergent phenomenon we turn to Kegan and Lahey (1984) who argue that life narratives create a 'meaning system'. Through personal feelings, thoughts, analysis and interpretations, Aksel and Martin's experiences have given them personal meaning through this meaning system. In other words, their meaning making of the specific events have given them values and learning outcomes that they may have used as a basis in their role in work life and later have led to their emergence as leaders. The importance of interpretation, sensemaking and learning from the stories are therefore central to increase self-knowledge (Avolio 1999).

Roberts et al. (2005) made a framework with two key dimensions of jolts, where jolts are based on either challenge or affirmation, and generated either by formal or informal mechanisms. In line with Avolio (1999), Roberts et al. (2005) also argue that not every jolt or event result in a revision of the self-concept, however, given that these experiences are highlighted, reflected on and analyzed, it is likely that these events have led to a revision of their self-concept and then acted in line with the change. Furthermore, the described events may go into the category of informal challenging jolts. Even though Roberts et al. (2005) describe jolts in a work environment, we do not see why it is not applicable in people's personal lives as challenging events may occur in any context or aspect of life.

Some of our interviewees were from the sports world because it would be interesting to see whether or not there are similarities between sports leaders and other leaders and because leaders in sports are often known to build good teams and athletes. In terms of challenges and struggles we chose to highlight two stories involving injuries as described in the findings. When turning to McAdams (2001) and the categorization of life events, Tim's meaning making and interpretation of his injury may be defined as an originating event or a turning point. It can be seen as an originating event since the event marked the beginning

of a new path, as Tim became a coach instead of a player. On the other hand, the event may also be a turning point because it marked a revision of a life direction. In contrast, Susan's experience of her injury worked more as an anchoring event. The event highlighted what to value in the situation and gave her inspiration to work hard and taught her that she could still contribute to the team even though she was injured.

The observation on the difference in which category the event falls under, even though the events are quite similar, is interesting because it tells us that each person's meaning making is unique and we make sense of experiences in different ways. Further, both Tim and Susan emphasized that their injuries were not severe, however, their experience of the injuries taught them valuable lessons about the team, their role and themselves. Thus, the learning one draw from a specific event and the sensemaking are more important than the story itself (Avolio 1999). In other words, some people may not learn anything from a story when others do. In this case, both Tim and Susan emphasized that they learned that one can contribute in another way and that everyone have their role in a team, however, the roles are not static. These are lessons they use every day in their roles as leaders.

A different observation when analyzing the interviews was that the emerged stories from people in sports acted largely out in a sports context. This is interesting as it implies that development and emergence of leadership occur within the sports context, as described in findings. However, it may be related to the amount of time that has been devoted to workouts to be able to develop into a decent player. Further, most great athletes start doing sport in an early age and as a result of this, much of the daily life occurs in a sport context. Hence, this may explain why much of their identity making evolves through events from sports (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Gergen 1994).

Another aspect of challenging events is the question that tends to rise after talking to someone who has gone through a rough time: *How did you make it?* This question is interesting as the world is full of people who maybe took the easy way out or did not cope with the situation very well. The interesting part here is why these people did cope with the situation the way they did. It would be easy for Aksel to walk down the same path as friends of him that ended up as drug dealers,

etc. or it would be easy to quit doing sports after injuries that did set them back in the development process. Interestingly but maybe not surprisingly, when searching for commonalities across the stories we were able to recognize that each of the storytellers described at least one “safe harbor”. We refer to safe harbor in the way that they all had someone in their life that they felt safe with and could relax around. In Aksel’s case it was his grandparents who did not live close by but still was described as a place of freedom. Further, the rest of them had a family or family members, which functioned as their “safe harbor”. This observation may be a coincidence, however, it is still important to keep this observation in mind.

Having discussed the category involving struggles we will now summarize what role struggles may play in leadership as an emerging phenomenon. First, the recounted stories may be seen in the light of agency narratives since the events have fostered the focus on the self, for instance in terms of taking responsibility. Second, we found challenging events across the interviews that have led to the same set of learning points, values and qualities within themselves, such as the power to win, independence, believing in themselves, drive and work ethics. These learning points are the same learning points that McAdams (2001) found in his research. Fascinatingly, these are all qualities and not specific skills or behaviours we tend to recognize in a leader. Nevertheless, these are qualities leaders tend to develop, which they further use to motivate others, act as a role model, set a good example, etc. This may imply that qualities developed through and after challenging events may have an influencing force on leadership emergence.

### **6.3.1 Taking responsibility for progression**

*Taking responsibility for progression* covers events where one has showed the ability to take initiative for the progression of one’s objectives. Objectives in this context may be both personal and organizational goals. For instance, taking on the initiative role and being proactive instead of waiting for something to happen (e.g. start their own business if one does not get a job).

In early stages, an interviewee demonstrated interest in entrepreneurship and during their period as students they established businesses to start their career.

“During studies I started my own consulting business, which gave me work skills and experience with the consulting sector. I think because of this I was a better candidate for my first job. A company hired me when it was recession in the market. It was 360 applicants but I got the position (...) I think that since I had started this consultant business I got hired. I had experience with entrepreneurship, practical experience and had learned a lot about responsibility” [Aksel]

One storyteller showed signs of taking responsibility in an even earlier age as there were not others that took much responsibility.

“Since my parents didn’t take much responsibility when I grew up, I had to take it (...) Also, I grew up in a bad neighborhood where many of my friends ended up as drug addicts, didn’t get a job or started selling drugs. If not taking responsibility for myself, it would maybe be easy for me to also go down the same path as them (...) A milestone for me was probably when I moved away from home as sixteen years old. It was not easy. I felt I had something to prove, and as I during my childhood and youth felt that I always had to prove something I have been used to take responsibility and being independent. And I like it.” [Aksel]

All interviewees showed clearly signs of being independent and responsible when we asked about events and stories that were work related. It was recurrent that this initiative role and independency had a focus on taking responsibility for employees and the future of the company. One interviewee showed signs of restlessness as he mentioned he liked to get things done even though the company wanted to wait.

“Yesterday an employee resigned as he wanted to work somewhere else. The firm did not want to start looking for other applicants yet but I felt that we did not have time to wait. Because of that I wrote a job advertisement today. I am not built to sit and wait for people thinking about if they are going to advertise the job or not. We needed to fill this position so why sit and wait when we can start the application process right away?” [Martin]

William also showed signs of concern for the organization and further development of the firm. Other interviewees mentioned the importance of development-oriented tasks, as such tasks were highly important for motivation and personal interest.

“When I started in the organization I am currently working for, I came in the position to ask if I could hire who I wanted and do what I felt was best for developing the department. Basically do almost whatever I wanted. And they gave me permission! I would not have gotten the opportunity if I didn’t ask. (...) This was very interesting, and

working with development oriented activities have been a great motivation for me.”

[William]

Further, several interviewees mention that they have a fearless attitude, which have helped them in their leader position.

“First of all, I am a person with a fearless attitude. I often see people that are afraid to talk to the top manager, however, I think it is just exciting. I want to do it and I always look forward to it. Because of this fearless attitude I think it is easier for me to go out to customers and sell our services to them. Many people seem to be afraid to do so when they do not have relations with customers. Instead, I approach customers and create such a relation (...) I don’t think it is one specific person that have had an impact on this fearless attitude, it is more about how I grew up as I had to take responsibility in an early age. I always have the feeling that everything will turn out ok in the end.” [Aksel]

In contrast, not all the interviewees stated that being an initiator was their main focus. One interviewee clarified that the most important focus was to facilitate for others’ development.

“I think I am more concerned with being a nominee and facilitate for others to be initiative and creative. Maybe it is a bit defensive (...) Per date there is a lot of new technology, which is important for our industry. I know I am not the one that is most interested and concerned with this, but I facilitate so others, that find this interesting, can work with it. I try to give them space to work with such things, within certain limits.”

[Henrik]

### **6.3.2 The role of taking responsibility for progression**

In contrast to “*leadership development as a natural process*” (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005), our findings imply that one may benefit from taking responsibility for own progression and development through being proactive and looking for possibilities. This is interesting because individuals may emerge as leaders through being more proactive. On the other hand, the awareness of taking initiative may vary and lay closer to some individuals than others. Additionally, even though the events typically involve the self we recognize that the initiatives tend to contribute to a group or a context that involves others (Gergen 2009, Andersen and Chen 2002, Hinkley and Andersen 1996). Again, we recognize that the interpretation of a narrative may decide which life narratives that are constructed (e.g. originating-, anchoring event) (McAdams 2001). This may be a

contribution to the literature as it implies that one can initiate one's development that leads to leadership emergence or create a new life path.

Leaders are often known to have high ambitions and a drive to succeed in what they do. To succeed and reach goals, leaders can take on an initiative role to make sure that progress happens, rather than waiting for something to occur. In this section we aim to understand how the storytellers have been an initiator and responsible for one self's development and how taking an initiative role have impacted their leadership emergence. We have seen patterns where the interviewees have from an early age been taking an initiative role and kept this mind-set in their position as managers.

According to Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), leaders drive consists of energy, tenacity, ambition and initiative. Instead of waiting for others to take action, our interviewees showed interest in being proactive to make things happen. This initiative role is present in our findings. Martin's way of acting proactive on the company's behalf by starting the hiring process immediately after an employee had resigned can show how Martin takes action to make progress for the company. Additionally, Martin stated that the company he works for did not aim to achieve higher result in 2016 than in 2015; something Martin found odd and boring. However, Martin still wanted to achieve better results than the previous year. Understanding this with an emphasis on the role of initiative, Martin challenges the process and shows knowledge about the business through being an initiator. Linking this story and the meaning of taking an initiative role to McAdams' (2001) agency theory, one can recognize how this initiative role can contribute to creating a meaning system based on responsibility and achievement. Taking action for hiring someone new or trying to achieve better results can be related to the responsibility and achievement theme as Martin shows individual successfulness and confidence by being the initiator on the firm's behalf. Furthermore, Martin's story can also illustrate how leaders tend to long for advancement and based on this take on a role to make sure advancement will appear (Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991). How Martin's initiator role has resulted in leadership emergence can be related to visibility and achievement. Based on Martin's initiative and the results he has generated, the company he works for has noticed him and offered him a higher position with more responsibility. This may

imply that taking on an initiator role can generate recognition from others, which leads to new opportunities and strengthen the role as a leader.

Moving to another story that also shows signs of taking on an initiative role is Aksel's establishment of his own consultancy business. Based on McAdams (2001), this event can be recognized as an originating event as the establishment of the consultancy firm can be connected to Aksel's long-term goals and beginning of a new path (Pillemer 2001). Again we turn to McAdams (2001) to gain a deeper understanding of the story related to agency theory, one can understand that being an initiator for own progress and career is related to both the status/victory theme and the achievement/responsibility theme. Establishing the consultancy firm attained recognition when applying for jobs, as it was beneficial to have practical experience and an understanding of the consultancy industry. Additionally, being an initiator for establishing something can contribute to feelings of being proud and confident. Based on this, Aksel might have grown to be more self-confident and led to feelings of accomplishments. Furthermore, the establishment gave him experience with consultant work and entrepreneurship, something Aksel mentioned was a good learning outcome that he has used a lot in his position as manager. However, the most important learning outcome from this story was that it led him to become more confident as he took responsibility for establishing a firm on his own, an attribute that is important in his position today. This is in line with Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), as establishing a business can illustrate ambition and initiative to be responsible for own career and self-development.

Interestingly, Aksel demonstrated clear signs of being an initiator throughout the whole interview. Through a troubled childhood he learned and understood that he needed to take responsibility for his own life. He continuously initiated actions for himself and for his own well-being. We can understand this in light of hardiness (McAdams 2001). People that are high on hardiness are better at dealing with uncertainty and change. Furthermore, we can see similarities between McAdams (2001) and Aksel's story on how he emerged as leader based on childhood- and student experiences. Aksel reflected upon stories that exerted control over difficulties in his childhood, which he stated have made him fearless. Aksel mentioned he liked to create relations with new customers and find it exciting to have meetings with his leader, which others find frightening. This can illustrate

that Aksel cope well with stressful situations, something that has evolved during his childhood (McAdams 2010), and that this fearless attitude has led to his leadership emergence.

Based on our interviewees' narratives and highlighted events we can understand the importance of taking an initiator role for leadership emergence as taking initiative is important for a leader to make progress, for oneself and on the company's behalf. Furthermore, we have seen that the leader's initiator role has been visible in different times in life. We therefore propose that taking initiative one can generate feelings of accomplishments. Feelings of accomplishments can impact the leader's mentality and create an understanding that by being an initiator will lead to a positive outcome. Further, continuing to be an initiator may positively repeat itself and result in encouraging responses from others (positive spiral). Moreover, this initiator role influences the individual's leadership qualities. As such, the initiator role has an impact on the agency theory and more specifically status, responsibility, feelings of being proud and higher confidence. Taking initiative is an important quality for leaders as they aim to lead others, throughout this study we have gained insight in how leaders have taken initiative and how it has led to their leadership emergence. Interestingly, our findings imply that one can to a certain degree influence one's own leadership emergence.

#### **6.4.1 Appropriating and channeling voices**

Events in this category emphasize experiences where "voices" or memories of lessons learned emerge in situations from valued people and relations. This can for instance be family, mentors, previous/current leaders, etc., which have taught them lessons that have influenced their behaviour. Whereas events may influence behaviour through how individuals make sense of the event, the category leadership emergence through the influence of voices are referring to how individuals make sense of relationships where one may adopt desired and valued behaviour.

Almost all of the interviewees mentioned people and relations that have been vital for them as these relationships contributed to support and further impacted their development of confidence and self-awareness. Through the interview period it was noticeable that often family members and previous/current leaders were mentioned as important voices, where certain voices or memories of important

people occurred to have taught them lessons that they brought with them in life, which they use in their role as leaders.

Relationships involving previous leaders was recurrent, where the interviewees copied qualities they considered valuable and important for their leadership development, for instance adopting qualities they meant were good for motivation and communication towards subordinates

“I have had both good and bad leaders. It has been an experience to try understanding how and why other leaders do as they do. That has made me adopt some elements that I consider as important. But also there are some elements that I have not considered as important or do not think show good leadership. Those I have not adopted. It is very much about finding my own thing too. A combination of elements from other leaders, along with my own elements” [Nikolai]

William stated the importance of previous mentors and how they have contributed to understanding theoretical aspects in more practical situations. He had recently graduated and was going to become a trainee at a big Norwegian company and because of this William did not have much practical experience. As such, it was of big help to have two leaders as mentors. They acted as dialogue partners and the interviewee learned a lot through their work experience. They knew their field well and had a great understanding of how to develop an organization. Moreover, the mentors had business focus but also recognized people in the organizations and the importance of interaction between human resources and business strategy.

“Through the mentor program I got a lot of personal attention and I had two leaders that taught me a lot. There is especially one event that I remember very well. In my time as a trainee I got the opportunity to participate on a board meeting. I sat in the corner and just listened to what they had to say. This was something my personal coach planned and it was very rewarding and exciting (...) Their high moral standards, high competence in the field and a lot of practical and on-the-job experience contributed to my own learning, which I have used later in my career as well.” [William]

Many of the interviewees mentioned family members that have influenced, been an inspiration and taught them something that they have used in their working life. A common factor has been that family members have been there as support and an inspiration to work hard and to be determined. Having support is important for all humans and naturally most respondents have had people in their family supporting them.

“I had a stepfather who was fantastic. We usually cleaned up after dinner and it was politics conversations from day one. He was a member of “Fagforbundet” and I was totally opposite, politically speaking. He was a strong father that showed me stability. We had really good conversation and I feel I could be open towards him. I hope I have taken a lot from him, especially his calming side” [Robert]

“My father has always been an inspiration. We moved a lot during my childhood because my father was ambitious and very aware of his career. I think this has also made me ambitious, and he pushed me to achieve something. Maybe not conscious but as I have seen how ambitious he was I think I have always looked up to him” [Nikolai]

”My parents have been essential for my development, especially my father. He taught me what he knew about sports. He was very pedagogical when it came to competing, winning and losing, and facilitated the development I wanted, in terms of interpersonal skills, effort and determination. He did this without pushing me too far, which led to me being excited for skiing. (...) During primary school there was almost like a competition of reaching Kikutstua. It was a big goal for everybody. I had the impression that I reached Kikutstua several years after everyone else. My father wasn't very focused on me getting there. We were more focused on having a good time, stop on the way to light a bonfire. (...) He taught me the importance of preparing, organizing and systematizing. I do this every day and I think it has originated from my father's' pedagogical methods from sports and my childhood.” [Mikael]

Through the interviews the storytellers often mentioned role models and how they had taught them lessons on how to work hard, something they also have brought with them as leaders. Eric told us about his relationship with his grandfather and how this relationship taught him about the necessity of hard work.

“I had a grandfather who ran a farm. From I was young I helped him with different tasks related to the farm. What I have understood and learned from my grandfather is that nothing goes by itself and that hard work pays off. My grandfather stood tall and worked until he was 80 years old. He was like a bauta for me. He dared to say his opinion, had faith in me and respected others. These are all things I value a lot today, which I try to use in my everyday life” [Eric]

The stories mentioned show that relationships have influenced them in different ways. Some highlighted people that have covered their safety need and have been a good support. Others learned important lessons and values that have been valuable in their leader position, for instance a better understanding on how to act towards people and subordinates.

### **6.4.2 The role of appropriating and channeling voices**

The key tension in this category is the presence of valuable voices in the interviewees' lives. Voices that have contributed to leadership emergence have appeared in both previous and present relations. Similar to the category involving teams, this category shows a concern for the social interplay to emerge as good leaders. This finding challenges the one-sided focus on the individual when studying leadership (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005), we argue that research should in a higher degree take into consideration how relations may influence leadership. Understanding this category in light of McAdams (2001), voices can be related to the communal theme as voices demonstrate the need of others. However, our findings also imply that voices have outcomes in terms of agency themes, such as taking responsibility and work hard towards own goals. This can be the utterance in a relationship that results in transmission of individual qualities, such as self-mastery and self-awareness. Further, whom the voices stem from seems not to be important. More important is the learning outcome from the relationship. This is a contribution to the literature as it first, similar to "getting people oriented through teams", presents the centrality of relations and the social interplay of leadership and the emergence of leadership. In addition, it shows how voices can travel between people and lead to adopting desirable features from others (Wertsch 1993). Second, the findings also give a more comprehensive picture of the complexity of how social contexts are related to qualities involving the self, such as responsibility and self-mastery.

We decided to link this category to Wertsch (1993) as it is interesting to understand how surrounding voices impact us. According to Wertsch (1993), based on Bakhtin's theory, relations around us create an utterance that is communicated from the "speaker" to the "other". We have identified how values from speakers have been transferred to the interviewees. In other words, how relationships have led to learning through guidance and support. Moreover, we believe that voices also cover influences from people that one does not necessarily have a relation to. One can copy desired values and behaviours from people that for instance have shown great leadership (e.g. historical people, idols). Furthermore, the expression "voices" is beneficial in this research since the term underlines what the person has learnt from the relationship, and which voices (e.g. values, behaviours, mind-set) they have carried with them. The importance

of voices may be significant for leadership emergence as social- and verbal interaction influences behaviour, which can result in features that are a direct cause for why they emerge as leaders. This can, for instance, be how to interact with followers and employees. Accordingly, previous and present voices can signal what values and beliefs one should apply from memories of valued people.

In Eric's story it became clear how a relationship can produce an "utterance" that is created through expressions and culture (Wertsch 1993). Eric observed and understood how his grandfather's mentality on hard work led to achievements on the farm. From this, one can see how the utterance travels between people and how humans do not act and speak in total isolation, rather behaviour and values are a result of voices and influences from people around us. Furthermore, Eric's story can illustrate how previous relations can contribute to emerging leadership as Eric learnt that hard work pays off, a mentality he stated he has kept with him from early age till now and has been essential to become a leader.

To better understand the importance of voices, we turn to McAdam's (2001) agency- and communal themes. The communal theme is concerned with being with others and the significance of sharing and belonging. We have recognized how the communal theme is fundamental in voices and how it may influence leadership emergence. To illustrate this, we can turn to Mikael's story about his father. Mikael's father was highlighted as a good role model during Mikael's childhood and the relationship shows connections to the communal theory through the sub themes, care and help. Through being a support, his father established a relationship with Mikael based on care and empathy. According to Mikael, his father gave him feedback to help him develop and improve. To grow and develop one needs relationships where there is openness for feedback and dialogue (Kluger and DeNisi 1996, Day 2000, Ford and Weissbein 1997). Since Mikael stated that his father was very pedagogical, one can assume that this way of being a role model contributed to openness for receiving feedback. The concern of being a role model can imply that feedback from his father was constructive, which facilitates personal development. A focus on caring and helping can have influenced his meaning system as a result of Mikael recognizing how it affected him. Having a pedagogical role model in an early age has taught Mikael to act in the same manner for the people around him and to be structured and systemized to achieve progress and development. This is an example of someone who adopted certain

features of a role model, where Mikael has used the same approach when being a role model and leader for others.

If we move away from childhood experiences, we can also see how the communal themes and the importance of caring and helping may have influenced people's life. Our storyteller William mentioned his mentors and how they contributed to his learning and development. Having a mentor can be related to the communal theme as the mentors cared for William's personal development and through receiving challenging tasks he increased his self-knowledge. Furthermore, we can understand the communal theme in this example by seeing it through the sub theme, dialogue. William stated that the relationship with the mentors often were filled with knowledgeable conversations as the mentors contributed to Williams' development through giving him advices based on individual experiences, which led to a better understanding of how to run a business. Again we can turn to Wertsch (1993) and the concern of the utterance that is communicated from one person to another. William's experience illustrate that verbal interaction may influence one's behaviour. The relationship between William and the mentors shows and underline that mentor-protégé relationships contributes to personal growth and development because mentors acts as role models through using own experiences to increase the protégé's skills (Ragins and Dutton 2006, Day 2000, Noe 1998). The sharing of the mentor's own experiences has increased his perception of how to lead and run a business. Furthermore, through dialogue he may have created a foundation for what type of leader he wanted to be, based on the mentor's personal experiences, thoughts and how they challenged him.

Robert and the relationship with his stepfather is a good illustration of the communal theme. Looking deeper into the story and the communal themes we recognize again the importance of dialogue. Through his childhood they often had good and long conversations, which led to understanding the importance of openness. The focus on openness as a learning point is a good example of how utterance and the voice of the speaker emerge in relationships. According to Robert, his stepfather's voice and way of acting has influenced Robert to be more open to others and he has also tried to keep this in his professional life, as openness creates better atmosphere at work. Moreover, to gain a richer understanding of how the relationship have led to Robert's leadership emergence we can turn to Hinkley and Andersen (1996), who argue that interactions

influence how you look at yourself, but also how one will interact with other people. According to Hinkley and Andersen (1996), having previous relationships that have contributed to positive behaviour can be used as a reminder on how to act towards people in the present.

Robert's relationship with his stepfather can also be understood through theory involving high quality connection (HQC), which involve relationships and connections that generate feelings of being appreciated and valued (Dutton and Heaphy 2003). Through high quality connections, people tend to create mutual positive regard, trust and active engagement. This positive mutual regard can lead to people feeling more open, which is in line with what Robert described the relationship contributed to.

With an interest on understanding the dynamics between communal- and agency themes, Eric's story about his grandfather is relevant again. This relationship was based on trust and the urge to master the farming. Eric received responsibility from his grandfather in an early age, something he did not take for granted. The received responsibility made Eric more confident and helped him develop a sense of responsibility and accomplishment, which is closely related to the agency theory. Eric stated that the relationship has helped him in his leader position as he has brought with him the belief that hard work pays off. As such, we can understand that the relationship has contributed to establishing a meaning system of both agency- and communion themes, based on values and learning points from the relationship.

Digging deeper into the agency theory, we can include Nikolai's experiences with previous leaders. Nikolai has had many previous leaders that have led to an understanding of what kind of leader he wants to be. Based on the awareness, he has copied qualities from some leaders, and ignored others from leaders he did not think conducted good leadership. We can relate this to agency theory and more specifically to the self-mastery theme. Continuously trying to adopt qualities one considers as suitable may show Nikolai's strive to master his way of leading and create a better awareness of what type of leader he aims to be. In addition to the strive to master, this may be an example of how one might adopt behaviour based on perception of what features that are desirable. Nikolai may have experienced reactions of previous leaders that have led to selection of which features to copy

(Roberts et al. 2005). This can be related to agency theory as it represents the individual's self-awareness and focus on self-development but also openness to learn and reflect on how to develop as a person (Judge et al. 2002, Sosik, Kahai, and Avolio 1998). The storytellers' focus on the self may therefore have led to his emergence of leadership.

Through the analysis and discussion of the importance of voices for leadership emergence, the commonality is that leadership emergence is not developed in total isolation. All our storytellers emphasized people and relationships that have influenced their behaviour. Aaltio-Marjosola and Lehtinen (1998) state that people's professional lives are often influenced by their personal lives, and leaders can often be seen as travelers between those two. Understanding this with an emphasis on our interviewees' stories, we recognize that relations that have an impact on leadership emergence do not only exist in their professional lives but also in their personal lives. We want to highlight the importance of having a role model or someone to look up to. Through the interviews we recognized that all relations were important because of what they learned from the other person. If it is a family member or a non-family member is not important, rather what the relationship has given them in terms of values and beliefs. This is in line with Wertsch (1993), and shows that leadership emergence is not an isolated process but an ongoing process where the social context consisting of people and relations are highly influential on people's leadership emergence. Further, highlighted recurrent outcomes have been to be hard working, supportive and take responsibility of the situation. Our findings imply that there is a direct influence of relationships on leadership emergence, which have led to behaviour patterns that leaders use on a daily basis.

## **6.5 Summarizing discussion**

Our findings underline the complexity of an event and how different individuals reflect and make sense of their life events. In other words, we have identified similarities between the storyteller's sensemaking, but also seen how different it can be. The findings from our research are a contribution to the literature as it first, presents the centrality of relations and the social interplay of leadership and the emergence of leadership. Second, our findings give a more comprehensive picture of the complexity of how social contexts are related to qualities involving

the self, such as responsibility and self-mastery. Third, that one can initiate one's development that leads to leadership emergence. Fourth, our findings expand the theory today with addressing how reflections and interpretations, in other words sensemaking, may lead to emergence of leadership. Additionally, how the sensemaking may turn into outcomes in terms of agency- and communion themes, and influence what type of event one relate the experience to (originating, anchoring, turning point, etc.) (McAdams 2001).

Having identified the four categories and discussed them accordingly have left the gap of looking at commonalities or differences across the categories. The complexity of someone's life story and specific events requires looking at the dynamics between the categories. We have discovered that the events throughout the categories contain key tensions. The identified key tensions may be related to DeRue and Wellman (2009) concepts of developmental challenges. This since we recognize challenges (key tensions) in every experiences across the four categories. "*Challenging experiences provide a platform for individuals to try new behaviours or reframe old ways of thinking and acting.*" (DeRue and Wellman 2009, 860). In other words, there are complex contexts in which one has to make decisions under conditions of risk and uncertainty. Key tensions may also contain elements of positive dramas to create a higher meaning (Carlsen 2008). Positive dramas are defined as "*particular fields of meaning and engagement constituted by people to organize experience into lived narratives; enacted self-adventures marked by a sense of something important being at stake, unpredictability, emotional engagement, and involvement of self*" (Carlsen 2008, 55).

The highlighted key tensions across the different categories have striking commonalities, not necessarily in how it emerges but in the challenges that lies within each narrative. To demonstrate, both the feeling that something is at stake and the negatively charged experiences (struggles) have the uncertainty and risk that things are not going to turn out as one wants to. Further, the drive of setting goals and being proactive has elements of pursuing new challenges and voices represent how the individuals have been challenged through relations. Additionally, we recognize positive dramas in the negatively charged experiences as it can represent "the battle" or voices where one enables positive personal development in other individuals (Carlsen 2008). Interestingly, this imply that challenging experiences reframe new ways of thinking and acting and further

foster behaviour patterns (e.g. being including, caring, proactive) and qualities (e.g. the power to win, independence, identifying needs in a group), which is all closely related to how the interviewees conduct their role as leaders today. The key tensions may therefore work as trigger events to create new learnings and reflections around their own behaviour (Avolio and Gardner 2005). However, we suggest that dramas do not necessarily work as triggers to new learnings that leads to leadership emergence; it is rather individuals' reflections and interpretations, in other words their "meaning system" (Kegan and Lahey 1984) that may give an indication whether the event may work as a trigger to new learnings.

To gain a deeper understanding of how the meaning system, reflections and interpretations may lead to learnings and personal development from tensions, we turn to Kegan and Lahey (1984) and McAdams (2001). Life events provide an explanation and justification of people's present self, and how people create a unique identity through their life story. The meaning system is a way to analyze, interpret and select elements from experiences which creates personal meaning. McAdams (2001) argues that the meaning system can be divided into agency- and communion themes, and that these themes accounts for all changes in an individual's life. Interestingly, we have identified elements of both agency- and communion themes in each category. The categories involving teams and voices are typical communion themes, whereas struggles and taking responsibility are typical agency themes. Illustrated in the findings table, even though the category is a typical agency- or communion theme, they contain components of both. This is interesting as it implies that the social interplay (communion narratives) may not only be important for the unity, but also to the development of qualities that involves the individual. Arguably, being with others, developing friendships and units may naturally foster communion themes such as love and togetherness, however, each individual's reflections, awareness and interpretations (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Gardner et al. 2005, Avolio 1999, Gergen 1994) of communion narratives may result in agency themes, such as responsibility and self-mastery. In contrast, agency narratives can result in communion themes as one may experience mastery through standing alone but still long for unity, togetherness and social relations.

In addition to the meaning system (Kegan and Lahey 1984) and agency- and communion themes, the individual analysis and interpretations of events may also

be influenced by their learning style and Kolb's experiential learning theory, which is concerned with individual's internal cognitive processes (Kolb 1981). Kolb states "*Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*" (Kolb 1984, 38). The different learning styles may be applicable as they can reflect how they solve problems to challenges and learn from it.

Within each of the categories we also see commonalities in how voices and characters can create a higher meaning involving the self. We believe that voices are a central element in all the events and categories, as human beings are social creatures where there will always be others involved. Therefore, we see that the events often contain a unity or influence from others, where the individuals are using and developing their interpersonal skills based on relationships with others. As such, we understand Wertsch (1993) role of utterance as crucial in several of the stories. Through the utterance, the storytellers have expressed concern of friendship and enmities, and events that have been filled with agreements or disagreements (Wertsch 1993). For example, Nikolai expressed the concern of copying leadership elements from some leaders, and ignoring elements from others. Furthermore, through the interviewees' stories, we believe voices around us may impact a person's self-mastery through the communal themes such as dialogue, caring, help and friendship. We see clear parallels between the agency- and communion theory, where voices creates a meaning system through the communal theme, which later influence the agency theme. For instance, in Eric's relationship with his grandfather where the relationship has increased his self-mastery through the mind-set of how hard work pays off. Also, our findings show the importance of having a safe harbor, and how it can contribute to leadership emergence. Having someone to support them (for instance through caring/help and dialogue) and to challenge them in a constructive and developmental way has been illustrated through many events and relations in our findings. Through this, we see how relations express values and points of views in relation to the situation, oneself and the utterance. All the events contain elements of voices and we can also link it to McAdams (2001) communal theme and the importance of being with others. For instance, many of the storytellers highlighted events that focused on dialogue, caring/help and unity. Even though the events showed signs of being concerned with struggles, the initiator role or teamwork, relations or

voices influenced the leader's behaviour through lessons learned from highlighted relations.

Another interesting observation across the categories is experiences that typically involve the agency theme, foster certain qualities such as seeing needs in a group or filling a role, where in contrast typical communal narratives tend to foster specific behaviour patterns. The complex combination between being open to new learning, individual's reflection/learning style, present tension and if the experience typically is a communal- or agency narrative may therefore give an implication of the learning outcome in terms of either specific qualities or behaviour patterns. This may give us valuable insight on an individual's leadership emergence.

Further, we believe the dynamic between the agency- and communal theme, and openness to learning are essential in leadership emergence and each individual's development as a person. Closely related is how individuals make sense of experiences based on other people's responses and behaviours (Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton 2011, Roberts et al. 2005). The other-awareness (communion), self-awareness (agency) and other people's positive reactions to behaviour may thus, as highlighted earlier, leads to a positive spiral. Furthermore, a positive spiral in terms of continually confirmation of their behaviour that facilitates the behaviour in which the individuals use in their leadership emergence.

As argued, we have found and recognized commonalities of key tensions in the identified categories that may be related to developmental challenges (DeRue and Wellman 2009) and dramas (Carlsen 2008), and the meaning system and how the interviewees interpret and analyze experiences. The meaning making through our meaning system may facilitate for the emergence of different events that have fostered the behaviour they today use in their role as leaders. Interestingly, the presence of tensions and the meaning making may therefore foster the emergence of the different life events (originating, anchoring, turning point, etc.) (McAdams 2001). The interviewees' meaning systems, reflections and actions might have facilitated for and created new paths (originating event) or values (anchoring event), which imply that they to a certain degree can create their own opportunities and ways of living through being proactive and take responsibility for their situation. Key tensions (Carlsen 2008, DeRue and Wellman 2009),

meaning systems (Kegan and Lahey 1984) and the categorization of events (McAdams 2001) may therefore be closely related and interacting, which leads to leadership emergence.

## **7.0 Contribution to the literature**

Through the life story approach with an emphasis on the four categories, we have built and extended the theory of leadership with a life story approach, and showed that the life story is important for leadership emergence. The study has been a long and challenging learning process, but through the process we have gained a deeper understanding of life stories and the importance of how we are formed by our experiences. Previous research has to a certain degree covered aspects of the role of life stories in leadership. However, it has in a higher degree been focused on life stories as a tool to develop leadership, rather than how our life stories may have been an influencing cause to the leadership emergence. As such, we believe that this research has contributed to extending the leadership theory with a life story approach with a greater focus on leadership emergence. The four categories deepen the literature of life stories for leadership emergence as they give insight on what type of relations or life events that may be essential for emergence of leadership.

The identification of key tensions in the categories expands the literature as it implies that new learnings and behaviour patterns are triggered by tensions in life events. In other words, challenging experiences are central when reframing new ways of thinking and acting. Further, we have linked key tensions to the individuals' 'meaning system' and their way of making sense of life events. We argue that the individual reflection system is essential whether an experience leads to new learnings and behaviour patterns.

Traditional research on leadership with a life story approach has focused more on individual development with no or less focus on how relations may have had an influence on personal development. Our research is an expansion of the literature with the highlighted dynamics between agency- and communion themes in life events as it implies that relations and the social interplay are central in individuals' leadership emergence. For instance, the social interplay (communion narratives) may not only be important for the unity but also to the development of

qualities that involves the individual. Being with others, developing friendships and units may naturally foster the communion themes such as love and togetherness, however, each individual's reflections, awareness and interpretations (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Avolio 1999, Gergen 1994) of the communion narratives may result in the agency themes, such as responsibility and self-mastery. In contrast, agency narratives can result in communion themes as one may experience mastery through standing alone but still long for unity, togetherness and social relations. Thus, this is a contribution to the literature through showing a more comprehensive picture of the complexity of how a social context are related to qualities involving the self and how contexts connected to the self are related to behaviour involving the unity.

We have emphasized the concern for leadership as a social phenomenon, where relations and relationships are essential for emerging leadership. Our findings imply that it is not the relationship itself that is essential, rather what the relationship consist of, and what the interviewees have learnt from it. Therefore, we have combined Wertsch (1993) arguments and thoughts on voices and how voices travel between people and tried to understand whether our storytellers have learnt something from previous relationships that they have brought with them and used as leaders. Doing this, we have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of having support from people around, developing leadership skills through the use of mentors and role models, and how some people copy certain qualities of good leaders, and combine it with their own leadership behaviour.

The highlighted interplay between key tensions, the meaning system, and agency- and communion themes shows the complexity of one's life story. This interplay may facilitate for the emergence of different events that have fostered the behaviour they today use in their role as leaders. In other words, this is a contribution as it underlines the complexity and how the presence of tensions, meaning making and the dynamics between the self and social relations may foster the emergence of the different life events (originating, anchoring, turning point, etc.).

Our findings also indicate that one can to a certain degree initiate one's development that leads to leadership emergence. Additionally, we have observed that certain life events and leadership emergence may have a reciprocal

relationship as events can shape leadership emergence, but the emergence may also lead to events or situations leaders would not have been in otherwise, which facilitate for further growth. For instance, through being a leader you get new challenges and possibilities, which can lead you to other challenges and situations. As such, we can see the relationship between leadership emergence and life events as an ongoing process, where the individual will continuously be exposed to events that influence their behaviour as leaders.

Last, this research has also contributed to our own personal learning, as we have become more aware of the importance of our own life stories. Through this process we have occasionally reflected on our own events and relations that have and will be important for our growth and development.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

In the thesis we have studied, analyzed and discussed leadership as an emergent phenomenon through formative experiences and relationships by using a life story approach. Despite the limitations in this study, we have been able to find interesting implications for both theory and practice. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing a broader understanding of how formative experiences and relationships throughout life may have influenced behaviour and led to emergence of leadership. Previous research on the life story of leaders has focused on finding events and experiences that can contribute to develop leadership traits and skills. In contrast, we have studied why leaders are the way they are today based on their life events, and we recognized that key tensions have been important for finding meaning in events. Based on the interviews we were able to identify four categories: *getting people oriented through teams, using struggles as sources of growth, taking responsibility for progression, appropriating and channeling voices.*

We recognize that the categories involving teams and voices may be seen in the light of communion themes and the categories involving struggles and being an initiator may be seen in the light of agency themes (McAdams 2001). However, the communion narratives also include elements of agency and the other way around, which highlight the complexity of someone's life story and specific events. For instance, a relationship (communion) can provide you responsibility in

a work situation, which further lead to mastery and independence (agency). Furthermore, one may have experienced mastery through standing alone but still longed for unity, togetherness and social relations. This shows the presence of agency themes but also the centrality of communion themes as a crucial part of one's life. Based on this, we have seen the interaction between communal- and agency themes and how they can influence each other, in other words, how communal themes can result in agency themes and vice versa. Everyone have different meaning systems and create personal meaning of events and experiences. We recognize the complexity and how individual the leadership emergence can be based on formative and relational experiences. Additionally, we have argued that it is not the events themselves that form behaviour and leads to the emergence of leadership, rather how the individuals evaluate the events and what learning outcome they bring with them into their meaning systems.

Our findings also imply that events surrounding communion themes foster certain behaviour patterns on how to treat others. However, we argue that these behaviours are not only fostered by the events, but more importantly their ability to reflect, analyze and learn from the experience. The commonality of outcomes across our findings involving others (communion) are to be caring, proactive, including and paying attention to the people around. Further, our findings imply that agency narratives foster qualities and values, such as the power to win, independence, believing in themselves, drive and work ethics.

The four categories are different from each other in many respects, however, all of them may provide potentially strong justifications for the individual's emergence as leaders. The leaders, which have been acknowledged as good leaders, have commonalities in both events and most importantly learning outcomes through the four categories. Additionally, the data implies that individuals can to a certain degree initiate their own development and leadership emergence. Our findings also indicate similarities in terms of meaning systems (Kegan and Lahey 1984) among leaders and the presence of tensions (Carlsen 2008, DeRue and Wellman 2009) in the recounted events and experiences. It is, however, important to keep in mind the complexity of someone's life story, and therefore needs more research to be able to gain a deeper insight in leadership emergence through formative experiences and relationships.

## **9.0 Limitations and future research**

There are several limitations to this study that need to be addressed when evaluating the contribution to the literature. First, in the presented study, interviewees were chosen based on their acknowledgements from fellow employees, customers or their own leaders. The interviews were based on self-report and the interviewee's own stories, which can make the findings vulnerable to social desirability bias. The reason for why this can be vulnerable for the study is because the storytellers may shape their story based on how they want to be perceived. Still, this study has its fundament in the individual's meaning making of their life story, however, it is important to have this in mind when conducting such a research. Furthermore, it could be favourable to conduct a more elongated study in terms of having several interviews with each of the participants as it could generate to a deeper thought and reflection process among the participants. This could result in more stories that have been essential for how they emerged as leaders.

Additionally, it should be noted that only two out of twelve participants were women. This unequal gender balance may have influenced our conclusion. Therefore, future research is needed to take the influence of the gender into account.

We suggest that future research may benefit from comparing leader's life stories and experiences to other's life stories, such as ordinary people, artists, scholars, etc. This may reveal whether stories contain specific leadership related learning outcomes. Moreover, to minimize the risk of social desirability bias one may compare stories the leaders have told themselves with stories other people in their life recount about the leader's life.

To gain a deeper understanding of leadership emergence from one's life story, research is needed on the interplay of key tensions and the individuals' meaning system. For instance, more research on how key tensions actually influence leader's' meaning system. In our research based on the storyteller's reflections, we have anticipated how their experiences have influenced their leadership emergence by self-selecting key tensions that we believe have been essential. However, if we had asked the interviewees about these key tensions we may not receive agreement upon all claims. Additionally, our research implies that

relations have a great influence on the involved individuals. Future research should dive deeper into the relational aspect of leadership emergence.

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## 11.0 Appendix

### 11.1 Interview guide

#### Phase 1: Introduction

- Introduction of us and our study
  - *Purpose of study*
  - *Confidentiality*
  - *Ask for permission to record*
  - *Can you please tell us a bit about your current situation? (work tasks, position in organization, etc.)*

#### Phase 2: Main interview

1. Describe the most important events/experiences throughout life, which have formed you to the leader you are today.
  - *Childhood (sports, clubs, friends, parents), education (Team, colleagues, projects, professors), mistakes, learned from difficulties/highs, crucial decisions, low points, greatest accomplishments.*
  - *What have you learned from these live events?*
2. Describe the most important relationships in your life, and how have they formed you as a person?
  - c. *Friends, parents, role models, mentor, teachers, professors, colleagues.*
  - d. *What have these relations taught you?*
  - e. *Have you experienced growth with your relations? - How have the interplay formed you as a person?*
3. Describe the most significant relationships that have influenced you as the leader you are today?
  - a. *Professional relations vs. personal relations?*
  - b. *Describe relations within this organization that have contributed to the role you hold*

#### Phase 3: Closure

- Do you feel that something is left out or something you want to add?

## **12.0 Preliminary**

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**BI Norwegian Business School – Preliminary Thesis Report**

# **Understanding Outstanding Leadership: The Role of Life Narratives and Relations**

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## 1.0 Introduction

Understanding leaders and why they are leaders has been of interest for many years. Bill Gates, Jens Stoltenberg, Steve Jobs and Barak Obama are all leaders that have been highlighted as good leaders. But what makes some leaders great and others not? To understand this it is first important to understand what leadership is. There are several different definitions of leadership that express the concern of good or efficient leadership and have an aim to label how leadership should be (Skogstad 1997, Northouse 2011, Yukl 2006). Leadership may also be about inspiring people to work for the company's goals and objectives (Hogan and Kaiser 2005, Kaiser, Hogan, and Craig 2008). Ciulla (2004) argues that many scholars do not distinguish between "what is leadership" and "what is good leadership", and that most existing definitions describe good leadership (Stashevsky, Burke, and Burke 2006, Ciulla 2004). One definition of leadership is

*"Leadership is process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group and organization"* (Yukl 2006, p.3)

Some researchers argue that leadership emergence and who is considered a leader talent is closely related to personality (Bono and Judge 2004, Judge et al. 2002, Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991). Judge et al. (2002) claims the basis for trait differences between non-leaders and leaders. Even though personality has often been linked with leadership emergence, other research proposes that it is not enough with a convenient personality to become a leader (Day 2001). Hamilton and Bean (2005) and Riegel (1975) propose that leadership is a function of interpersonal development, where social interaction between leader, followers and the situation is crucial. To develop leaders, researchers highlight the importance of context and environmental factors to get a successful outcome (Riegel 1975, Avolio and Luthans 2006, Avolio 1999).

Personality and environmental factors may explain some aspects of leadership and how it emerges. However, several researchers argue that leadership and leadership emergence are highly influenced by life narratives or life events (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Shamir and Eilam 2005, Bluck and Habermas 2000, Ligon, Hunter, and Mumford 2008). Human beings use life-stories to make sense of events that have happened and use these events to guide their lives. Shamir,

Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005) argue that the approach of studying leadership should have a focus toward a life-story approach, where the stories should consist of important messages about identity, values, traits and beliefs leaders use to justify their role of leadership.

The primary aim for the thesis is to study why some people become leaders and some not, with an emphasis on life narratives. We want to study life narratives of leaders and understand how and which relations, such as family, friends, romantic relations, role models, mentors etc., are essential for why they have become leaders. Thus, through the thesis we will study how developmental experiences in relation to social relationship can impact emergence of leadership. Additionally, how leaders can make sense of these experiences and how it can affect leadership identity is also an interest.

### **1.1 Research question**

In response to researchers that argue that personality and environmental factors are important in leadership development and emergent (Bono and Judge 2004, Judge et al. 2002, Riegel 1975, Avolio and Luthans 2006, Avolio 1999), we believe, in compliance with other researchers, that life events has a great impact on leadership behaviour (Ligon, Hunter, and Mumford 2008, Bluck and Habermas 2000, Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler 2005, Shamir and Eilam 2005). According to Josselson and Lieblich (1999), life stories can provide an explanation of how a person is at present, where life stories are used to recount and justify one. Whereas many researchers study what makes a good leader, we want to contribute to the literature by studying how leaders use their life experiences to create meaning and further to use this to excel as leaders. Others or oneself may ask questions like “why and how have I become a leader?”, where life stories may provide the answer. Furthermore, as humans are social creatures where interaction influences an individual’s behaviour (Insel and Young 2001), understanding life narratives with an focus on relations and how this can contribute to outstanding leadership is an interesting approach for our thesis. As such, the aim of our paper will be to explore the following question:

*Which life experiences associated with social relations seems particularly formative for development of positive deviant leadership?*

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Personality**

Several researchers argue that leadership and who is considered as a leader talent is closely related to personality (Bono and Judge 2004; Judge et al. 2002; Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991). Personality can be defined as characteristics that explain the behaviour pattern of a human, and further claimed to be relatively stable throughout life (Goldberg 1990).

The five-factor model of personality (the Big Five) has been widely used to describe main aspects of personality and how it is related to personality (Goldberg 1990). The five-factor model describe five main domains that are used to define the personality; extraversion, openness, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness.

Bass and Stogdill (1990) state that all studies included in their review found a positive relationship between low neuroticism and leadership. In addition, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) and Judge et al. (2002) argue that good leaders are more likely to be perceived as lively and energetic, which may be associated with extraversion. Openness to experience has also been found to be positively related to good leadership and argue that individuals that are open to experiences are more likely to emerge as leaders (Judge et al. 2002; Sosik, Kahai and Avolio 1998).

In addition to the Big Five, McAdams (2010) describe *hardiness* as crucial for psychology of meaning. Kobasa (1979) and McAdams (2010) argue that individuals that are high on hardiness are more likely to deal with uncertainty and change easier than individuals that are low on hardiness. Hardiness can be seen as part conscientious, low neuroticism and high openness to experience (Bogg and Roberts 2004).

### **2.2 Environmental factors**

Even though personality has often been linked with leadership emergence, research proposes that it is not enough with a convenient personality to become a leader (Day 2000). Environmental factors have for some researchers been seen as crucial in development of leadership (Riegel 1975). Stogdill (1948) was the first to connect leadership with environmental factors. He claimed that leadership had

a lot to do with the context. Thus, he proposed that one can be a great leader in one context and not a leader in another context. That context is crucial for the outcome of leadership, which is supported by Smirich and Morgan (1982). They claim that there is no recipe to follow for becoming a great leader. Hamilton and Beam (2005) and Riegel (1975) propose leadership as interpersonal development, where social interaction between leader, followers and the situation is crucial.

Researchers have found that mentors and role models are important for emerging leadership (Day 2000). A role model is someone other individuals desire to be like, in the future or present. The mentor's role is to give the protégé feedback and guidance, act like role models and give constructive critique (Noe 1988). People can become better leaders through mentoring as the mentors can use own experiences to increase the protégé's skills (Noe 1988). Interviews of leaders conducted by Standford-Blair and Dickmann (2005) discovered that mentoring was important for leadership development and emergence, where the mentors gave them feedback, guidance and acted like role models, constructive critics and skill builders. Thus, use of a mentor can provide career-facilitation through giving challenging functions. Mentoring can therefore contribute through counselling, encouraging and coaching (Noe 1988). Tonidandel, Avery and Phillips (2007) have through their study showed that the use of mentors can give success for the protégé. Through a study of a female basketball team it was shown that the performance among the athletes increased through the use of a mentor.

Feedback may increase performance, and Kluger and DeNisi (1996) indicate that an environment that considers feedback as important is crucial for leadership development. However, for some, feedback can be perceived as threatening and some people can understand feedback as criticism. As of this, it is crucial that to become a leader one must be willing to accept advice and feedback (Day 2000). Further, a climate that supports feedback and learning is important for leadership to occur (Ford and Weissbein 1997). Organizations should create challenging tasks that pursue people to learn new skills. It is claimed that approximately 70% of leadership development occurs in the context of the work (Robinson and Wick 1992).

### **2.3 Narratives**

Humans create stories to organize a big load of information (McAdams 1993).

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Life narratives create, according to Kegan and Lahey (1984), a ‘meaning system’, where a person’s feelings, thoughts and acts are analyzed and interpreted so that it gives personal meaning. The narrator, or the storyteller, selects elements that will confer meaning on previous events (Josselson and Lieblich 1999). Looking through literature of narratives and life stories, a common factor is that leaders use previous experiences to create and express identity and build an image (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler 2005; Bruner 1991; Gergen 1994). This identity is spoken, reviewed and retold throughout life, and the story creates a personal identity that exposes what we say and think about ourselves (Lieblich et al. 1998; McAdams 2001; Neimeyer and Metzler 1994). McAdams (2001) argue that a person’s identity takes a form of a story, and that the story consists of scenes, characters, plot and theme. Further, people tend to reconstruct the past and identify the present so they can anticipate the future based on the narrative of self. Avolio (1999) states that it is not the stories itself that is important but rather which lessons leaders can draw from previous experiences.

However, life stories do also transmit cultural meaning as stories are constructed based on building blocks within their culture (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 1998). Because of this, the narrative mirrors the values and norms within the certain culture (McAdams 2001).

Regarding the image building, life stories can be a good leadership tool, where leaders can use life narratives to establish self-justifications and a good relationship with their followers (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler 2005). Shamir, Dayan-Horesh and Adler (2005) discovered that leaders who learn from previous experiences establish strong social characteristics such as curiosity and industriousness. Characteristics like curiosity and industriousness can gain self-respect and respect of others.

## **2.4 Life events**

Unusual and unexpected events that are emotionally evocative often make a deeper impression and do often provide the basis around which life narratives that are constructed (Brewer 1986). According to McAdams (2001), these kind of events create more personal meaning than others, and one can divide important life events into six categories: *originating events*, *turning points*, *anchoring events*, *analogous events*, *redemptive events*, and *contaminating events*. An

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originating and turning point event indicates the beginning of a new life plan. For instance, originating events may be events linked to the beginning of a new career, where the event is closely connected to long-term goals and a plan to meet those goals (Pillemer, 2001). A turning point implies a concrete episode that changes the direction of a person's life. A similarity between originating events and turning points is that they both are tied to future goals and acts as motivation for life actions.

Anchoring events represents the foundation for a belief system (Pillemer 2001). Mental models operate as reminders of how the world is constructed, and anchoring events signalize events that should be valued and events that should be avoided. Such events occur when events of the present activate a memory from the past. The present event has some similarities with past events, and lessons learned from the past events will remind the person of what to do, based on previous experiences (Schank 1990). Last, closely related with anchoring events comes analogous events, but these are more relevant in later stages of life, when a person has a richer database of experiences.

In the original theory, McAdams (1997) included redemptive- and contaminating events. Redemptive events, or negative events have showed to have a positive impact on leadership development as they contribute with mental models where negative situations can be turned to something positive. Contrariwise, contaminating events are events that have given the person's positive attributes but later created negative consequences and acted as a reminder of failure.

## **2.5 Relations**

Understanding life as a story involves highlighting some participants and ignoring others (Josselson and Lieblich 1999). Rae and Carswell (2000) found in their study of entrepreneurs that their relationships were fundamental in their learning and development as an entrepreneur and leader, this included role models, parents, friends, business owners, employees, consultants, etc. Furthermore, researchers have also identified actual life events that are argued to have contributed to leadership development and emergence (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Maitlis 2009). These events are described as trigger events or critical events that may be both positive and negative. Much discussion on emergence of leadership has involved early childhood (Campbell 2005). Understanding events including parent-child

relationships and childhood experiences may therefore be helpful to understand capabilities in leaders and why they became leaders (Aaltio-Marjosola and Lehtinen 1998). Research also argues that the social environment affect the maturation of structures in the child brain, which again influence behaviour later in life (Snyder and Lopez 2007).

There are several different relational theories. Gergen (2009) proposes that all individuals hold to be real, rational and valuable depends on the well being of their relationships. Thus, it is through individual's relations that individual functioning emerges. Moreover, studies also argue that the need of belonging is strong enough to overcome physiological and safety needs (McLeod 2007). Social exchange theory introduce a perspective that propose that humans engage in relations that are rewarding in terms of both in tangible and intangible ways (Emerson 1976, Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). There is also research that relationships are essential for individuals' ability to develop their sense of self. The rational self is feelings and beliefs that individuals have regarding themselves and are in a high degree influenced by interactions with others (Andersen and Chen 2002). This means that people's emotions and behaviours are formed by both existing and previous relationships. Thus, research argues that events and interaction with other people both affect one's behaviour with interactions with new people and the way you look at yourself (Hinkley and Andersen 1996).

Humans are social creatures and studies imply that relations with other people are what have the greatest impact on an individual's behaviour (Insel and Young 2001). According to Berscheid (1999), relationships are a central source to life enrichment, satisfaction, development and personal growth (In Riggins and Dutton 2006). Relationships can represent meaning in people's life but also give a deeper understanding of the organizational context (Riggins and Dutton 2006).

Furthermore, Berscheid (1999) proposes that human behaviour occur from context consisting of relationships. According to researchers, relationships can be useful resources that may create a strong network of supportiveness (Riggins and Dutton 2006; Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek 2000). Riggins and Dutton (2006) address the term positive work relationship, where they state the importance of relationships at work that can contribute to effectively developing of people. This is supported by Dodgson (1993), which states that positive relationships help people open up and increase people's cognitive capacities to how approach activities. As such,

relationships can contribute to personal and organizational learning. In addition, Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek (2000) state that relationships are a crucial factor for career development, where relations can be used as a mean to reach career goals.

There are numerous relational theories and they have different perspectives, however, they are conclusive in that social relationships have a great impact on human behaviour (Snyder and Lopez 2007).

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 The Life Story Interview**

Storytelling is crucial in the life story interview, whereas the life story is giving direction, validates the storyteller's experiences and contributes to strengthen community bonds (Atkinson 1998). According to Atkinson (1998, p. 8), life story can be defines as

*“The story a person chooses to tell about the life he has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another”*

Atkinson (1998) claims that life stories can provide understanding of the context one is in. Further, Bruner (1986) state that life narratives can contribute to the learning of how we construct our lives. Our aim with this study is to see different central life elements, events and beliefs as a whole story and make sense of them. Of these life stories we want to understand and learn how leaders creates value of these. By using life story interview, a greater emphasis is on personal narratives and the interviewees' own experiences without asking too direct questions (Atkinson 1998).

#### **3.2 Choice of method**

We consider qualitative methodology as appealing because of our aim for the paper. Kvale (1996) propose qualitative interview as “wandering with the interviewee”, where the interviewer is a traveling companion that tries to understand the interviewee's story of the “lived world” (p.4). Qualitative method wants to capture the respondent's cognitive and emotional view of the world (Bryman and Bell 2011; Fog 2004).

Since the aim is to study emergence of positive deviant leadership related to narratives and relationships, we consider a qualitative approach to be the natural choice. Our aim and research question require in depth responses, which we may receive through in depth interviews. Furthermore, narrative inquiry is essential in this context. According to Andrews, Squire and Tambokou (2008), narrative inquiry is based on the understanding that humans understand life and make sense of it through storytelling, which is essentially what we want to achieve with this thesis.

### **3.3 Research design and data collection**

The paper seeks to contribute to seeing patterns in how good leaders emerge through formative experiences and relationships. To get an understanding on how life narratives influence leadership, it is important to enquire the participants' experiences as leaders, and further connect this to life narratives. As such, we will have an emphasis on context and more specifically how certain life events have unfolded over time, and how certain life events had an impact on the respondent (Bryman and Bell 2011). We will use life story interviews as it contributes to place experiences into sequences and can give rich indexical statements as it refers to personal experiences (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). This may help us link important events together so we can identify connections. Our approach will be inductive as the aim is to draw theory from our data collection (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Our data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews at different levels in 2-3 organizations. We will focus on open-ended questions, where the aim is to have a conversation with the respondents rather than questioning. We will notify the respondents in advance about the content of the interview to increase the likelihood of getting comprehensive and in depth answers.

Appendix 6.1 shows a draft of our interview guide.

### **3.4 Data Sample**

When it comes to our sampling strategy, we will use purposive- and convenience sampling (Bryman and Bell 2011). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy, where the sample consists of respondents within the population that has particular characteristics that are of importance of our study.

We aim to have a sample consisting of high performers who has proved good leadership or performers that have potential to become great leaders. Furthermore, we want to sample from 2-3 organizations; one or two businesses and one sports organization. We believe this may give us a diverse and interesting sample. In total we want to conduct 12 interviews. Within each organization we aim to sample people who have grown with each other and are in the same network. As of the sports organization, we wish to sample two coaches and two athletes.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

All participation in the study will be considered as voluntary. Further, participants will be guaranteed confidentiality of any information they share with us. To ensure their confidentiality, the participants will sign an agreement form that ensures confidentiality. Audiotaped records will be deleted after the records are transcribed, and the transcription will not be known for others than us.

### 3.6 Challenges and limitations

A challenge for us may be that life events that have had an impact on the respondents are personal and therefore it can be difficult to create trust between interviewer and the interviewee. As of this, we want to showcase that we are looking for what formed them to be a leader rather than their life narratives. The respondents may not be willing to share meaningful information that can be essential for our study. Therefore, we need to prepare for how to create an atmosphere and an interview that makes the respondent feel secure. Furthermore, our interview guide needs to be organized such that the respondents do not feel intimidated by the topics that we aim to cover.

### 3.7 Timeline

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| January  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deadline for preliminary thesis Jan 15<sup>th</sup>.</li> <li>• Continue with the literature review</li> <li>• Clarify/improve research question</li> <li>• Method review</li> <li>• Create interview guide</li> </ul> |
| February | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing on dates for interviews with companies</li> <li>• Conducting interviews</li> <li>• Transcription (continuously)</li> </ul>  |

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| March     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conducting interviews</li><li>• Transcription (continuously)</li><li>• Analysis</li></ul> |
| April     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Writing on thesis</li><li>• Need more information?<br/>Conduct new interviews</li></ul>   |
| May       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Writing on thesis</li><li>• Handing in 1<sup>st</sup> draft (latest)</li></ul>            |
| June      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with corrections from 1<sup>st</sup> draft</li></ul>                                 |
| July      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Submit final thesis</li></ul>   |
| September | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deadline for final thesis submission.</li></ul>   |

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## 6.0 Appendix

### 6.1 Interview guide

#### Phase 1: Introduction

- Introduction of us and our study
  - *Purpose of study*
  - *Confidentiality*
  - *Ask for permission to record*
  - *Can you please tell us a bit about your current situation? (work tasks, position in organization, etc.)*

#### Phase 2: Main interview

1. Describe the most important events/experiences throughout life, which have formed you to the leader you are today.
  - *Childhood (sports, clubs, friends, parents), education (Team, colleagues, projects, professors), mistakes, learned from difficulties/highs, crucial decisions, low points, greatest accomplishments.*
  - *What have you learned from these live events?*
2. Describe the most important relationships in your life, and how have they formed you as a person?
  - *Friends, parents, role models, mentor, teachers, professors, colleagues.*
  - *What have these relations taught you?*
  - *Have you experienced growth with your relations? - How have the interplay formed you as a person?*
3. Describe the most significant relationships that have influenced you as the leader you are today?
  - *Professional relations vs. personal relations?*
  - *Describe relations within this organization that have contributed to the role you hold*

#### Phase 3: Closure

- Do you feel that something is left out or something you want to add?