

BI Norwegian Business School

- Prosperous Micromanagement -

A qualitative study of leadership behaviour in high performing retail stores

Hand-in date:
01.09.2016

Campus:
BI Nydalen

Examination code and name:
GRA 19003 Master thesis

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Program:
Master of Science in Leadership and Change

This thesis is a part of the MSc programme at BI Norwegian Business School. The school takes no responsibility for the methods used, results found and conclusions drawn

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to express our sincere gratitude towards our supervisor Arne Carlsen for his support, frank advice, and valuable visions regarding our thesis and for taking his time to care for our needs during our last semester at BI. Thank you, Arne, for micromanaging us into prosperity.

Additionally, we want to thank our representative at Steen & Strøm and our interviewees for taking time off their busy schedules and help us achieve our goals. Thank you for your truthful answers, good conversations and for giving us personal and deep insights into your companies. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Furthermore, we would like to thank all of our classmates over these last two years for the great camaraderie, thoughtful conversations, exchanging ideas and for letting us be a part of your life. Thank you for the laughter's during lunch and for challenging us into better people.

Petter would like to first and foremost thank his girlfriend Marte for her continuous and undivided support and love during our years together. He especially wants to emphasize his gratitude towards her for spending several early mornings and late nights taking care of their daughter Vilma while he has been going back and forth between work and school. Thank you Marte. Furthermore, Petter wants to thank his partners in crime Lars Peter Raknes and Massoud Valipoor for cooperating in numerous school assignments and for all the great laughs, thoughts and deep conversations.

Lars Peter also want to thank Massoud Valipoor in addition to Petter Bergstrøm for all the good times during the past two years. Furthermore, he has a lot of gratitude towards his wife who was pregnant during the writing of the thesis, and gave birth to their son, Vincent the 29th of July. Thank you for all the patience and support during the last months.

Petter Bergstrøm

Lars Peter Raknes

Oslo, August 2016

Oslo, August 2016

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Abstract

In response to the negativity surrounding micromanagement, we aim to research and show that micromanagement is not a one-sided evil, as it is viewed in today's literature. We will explore and compare three different high-performing cases and dwell deeper into their leadership behaviour. Despite their success we located several behaviours associated with micromanagement. Six different categories with coherent practices was identified: (1) *rigorous attention to detail & external appearance*, (2) *meticulous planning, execution & follow-up*, (3) *strict financial & logistical control*, (4) *surveillance & testing*, (5) *comprehensive training and never-ending learning* and (6) *social modelling & caregiving*.

Moreover, by thoroughly excavating the term micromanager we have been able to add further substance to the term, exploring numerous uncharted territories revealing new unascertained discoveries regarding this bedevilled phenomenon. Where contemporary leadership theory has leapfrogged the advantageous sides of the term, we have reaped its prosperity fulfilling its inherent potential. We have showed that its latent abilities have to be buoyed by other factors to truly flourish, explicitly by social modelling and caregiving. Additionally, we have presented, compared and adduced similarities between micromanagement and other acclaimed theoretical terms. Divulging distinct coinciding facets amongst them exhibiting that the road from malpractice to prosperity is shorter than one might imagine.

Part I: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the leadership literature, *Micromanagement* is commonly found to be a negative loaded word, often used as a synonym for poorly conducted leadership (Chambers 2004, 14; Knight 2015; White 2010; Wright 2000; Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser 2010; Amabile et al. 2004; Sidhu 2012). Micromanagement can be defined in many ways. Chambers defines it as “*the excessive, unwanted, counterproductive interference and disruption of people or things*” (2004, 14). In her Harvard Business Review publication, Rebecca Knight characterizes a micromanager as “*a boss who lasers in on details, prefers to be cc’ed on emails, and is rarely satisfied with your teams’ work*” (Knight 2015, 2). Furthermore, Richard D. White describes a micromanager as: “*the bothersome boss who second-guesses every decision a subordinate makes*” (2010, 71). He states that micromanagers typically complain about font-sizes, monitor e-mails, frustrating and demoralizing their subordinates. Moreover, a micromanager wants to be in control of everything, even the smallest of details. This can damage the whole organization, and in the long run risk the company’s competitiveness (White 2010).

We believe that the critique is somewhat exaggerated and that micromanagement can be a productive tool for leaders when conducting situational and personal leadership. We propose that it is possible to find positive outcomes of micromanagement in the retail industry. The store manager is a vital and highly influential individual in small and medium retail stores. Usually, he or she is personally responsible for both the bottom-line and the day-to-day operations, including: organizing, follow-up, training and motivating the employees. In the retail industry employment turnover-rates are rather high compared to other industries. Moreover, the employment group is usually young, inexperienced and can be unmotivated since they often feel that their job is only a temporary solution before engaging in their studies or exploring other work and life opportunities. In this climate, it is deemed reasonable that it can be necessary to be a micromanager in certain situations. With the intention of making sure that the work gets done and that the store deliver the expected results. **We do not by any means claim that the term micromanagement is exclusively positive, rather we aim to**

research and show that micromanagement is not a one-sided evil, as it is viewed in today's literature. We will explore and compare three different cases and dwell deeper into their leadership behaviour and unearth findings contradicting contemporary theory divulging that micromanagement can indeed embolden prosperity.

We are fascinated by this topic because of our personal experience from the retail industry and other work environments. Where we both have witnessed the use of micromanagement as one of many tools a good leader has in his or her repertoire and that it can have a positive impact on effectiveness. Further we have witnessed the lack of micromanagement and the consequences that derive from a laissez faire leadership approach. We find it intriguing that stores within the same retail-chains have enormous variations in their performance. With a similar concept, guidelines, target-group, store design and merchandise, the managers and employees in each store have to constitute a large part of this difference and perhaps be the major catalyst for success. In cooperation with Steen & Strøm, after having ruled out the "location effect", we have investigated this phenomenon further by delving into the leadership behaviour in three different cases. These three are one high-end fashion store, one children's clothing store and one fast food restaurant, all of them among the highest performers in their resided segments of the industry.

After having examined the three different cases we have identified numerous micro-managerial traits in these high-performing stores. Further we will present our case and argue why and how we champion that micromanagement can truly foster prosperity.

Part II: Theoretical Background

2.1 Introduction

In the leadership literature, micromanagement is presented as a disease that should be treated and cured. Others describe micromanagement as an evil that must be eliminated. Furthermore, the existing leadership literature and research are more or less exclusively negative. However, after searching for literature and research on the topic, it seems that micromanagement is somewhat neglected. Taking the abovementioned in account, we believe to have identified a research gap regarding the positive side of micromanagement.

2.2 A complimentary review of Micromanagement

When gathering material for a corporate training session on “Avoiding the Traps of Micromanagement”, Chambers states that he “*found zero publications on this specific topic*” (2004, ix). Initially, this leads us to believe that there is a limited amount of available research within this field. However, after reviewing literature on both micromanagement and good leadership behaviour, we have witnessed that the examined managers have several things in common with both genres of leadership theory. This will be debated in the latter parts of this review.

Robert F. Wright defines micromanagement as: “*to manage things closely; to evaluate under close scrutiny; to manage a small portion of a larger process*” (2000, 362). He mentions that micromanagement can have positive outcomes when working with repetitive and menial tasks. At the same time, Wright points out that most employees are hired because they are able to think by themselves. Prohibiting this is thought to be the reason for the collectively negative perception of micromanagement (Wright 2000). Rebecca Knight states that by micromanaging a team one can reduce the teams’ moral, create mistrust and limit the team’s capability to grow. Additionally, the necessary focus on the most important issues evaporates, and it is easy to loose sight of the holistic picture. Knight treats micromanagement as a diagnose, and presents the vaccine as a 7-step procedure, with reflecting on ones own behaviour, getting feedback, stepping slowly back and building trust among the main steps (2015).

In fact, a micromanager shares a lot of characteristics with destructive leadership behaviour. Destructive leadership can be defined as: *“a process in which over a longer period of time the activities, experiences and/or relationships of an individual or the members of a group are repeatedly influenced by their supervisor in a way that is perceived as hostile and/or obstructive”* (Schyns and Schilling 2013, 4).

Alvesson and Sveningsson did a qualitative study of an international knowledge-intensive R & D company. In this company, micromanagement was a common label for bad management practice. They portray a micromanager as a person who removes the ability of decision-making away from the people who is best suited to take them. Possibly further interfering in details that could be best understood by their subordinates (2003). In an extreme case, micromanagement can be a compulsive behavioural disorder, similar to that of addicts and alcoholics. They all seem to lack the ability of recognizing their own controlling-behaviour and have a level of dubiousness and self-doubt within them. Micromanagers are control freaks with an obsession for meaningless details. They can create deadlines for no reason, refuse to give credit to subordinates, count the amount of paper used when printing and other behaviours showing a severe need of control and supervision (White 2010).

White implies that it is possible to be a good manager while exercising micromanagement to a certain degree. Nevertheless, he is using the term micromanager almost exclusively with a negative tone. Further, he states that details are important, especially when carrying out specific tasks. However, when the manager is getting *“overly concerned with nit-picking details”*, the road to micromanagement is short (White 2010, 72). What the literature labels as micromanagers resembles the dark side personality characteristic named *“diligent”* in the sense that they can be extremely particular, nit-picking and are alienating their staff who soon would shy away from any initiative and just wait to be told what to do (Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser 2010, 566)

In a bureaucratic organization it is very likely that it exists micromanagers. A bureaucratic organization is often full of middle managers, detailed routines, clear descriptions of work roles and well-defined reporting channels. The middle

managers are caught between following corporate strategy and visions at the one hand and administrative demands and practical constraints at the other. With too many managers it is easy to use time on monitoring and picking on the subordinates rather than maintaining an aerial perspective on the business (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003).

In “Strategies for avoiding the micromanagement trap”, Wright is taking a closer look at micromanaging of sales representatives. He highlights that recent research shows a strong correlation between micromanagement and perceived lack of autonomy felt by sales representatives. Micromanagement eliminates the need for sales representatives to take initiative, be creative and think for themselves. Wright also points out that micromanagers over-focus at the mean rather than aiming their attention towards the results (Wright 2000). Following an exact sales process can be beneficial when training new employees. However, a more experienced employee will probably become frustrated in the same situation. This supports the claim that perhaps in an environment, as previously portrayed in the retail industry, where the workers are inexperienced and lack ownership of their jobs, that micromanagement indeed can promote prosperity.

Amabile et al. investigated the influence of perceived leadership support on creativity. Through a qualitative study of diary narratives, 2 of 26 teams were closer looked upon, one of them performing among the best, the other at the bottom. The leader of the least successful team was labelled a micromanager. He made highly experienced team members feel over-controlled. His monitoring behaviour caused frustration and reduced the teams' effectiveness (2004). We believe that the problem in this case, as in many others, is that the manager who fails is probably not only a micromanager. From the descriptions, he genuinely seems like a horrendous manager, where many of his other shortcomings are unfairly labelled directly towards his micromanagement. It is perhaps unfair to label a manager due to ones perception of that person and his or her actions. Humans are complex beings that need to be viewed from a broader perspective to be truly understood.

In a highly creative environment, as the one investigated, one would assume micromanagement to be a less successful leadership style. The managerial

behaviour of the unsuccessful leader supports this claim. At the same time, the top-performing manager monitored his team members as well, one of the key characteristics of micromanagement. However, it is stated that his “*skills allowed him to do so in a much more relationship-enhancing fashion*” (Amabile et al. 2004, 27). The successful manager monitored progress, regularly provided guidance to his subordinates and other micro-managerial behaviours. On the other hand, he puts the same amount of focus on the importance of social interactions and recognition. He reacted to problems with willingness to help and he praised good work both in private and in public. Further, he helped alleviate stressful situations for the subordinates, addressed the subordinates feelings and showed support for his team members actions and decisions (Amabile et al. 2004, 17-20). Amabile states, “that effective leadership requires skill not only in managing both subordinate tasks and subordinate relationships, but also in integrating the two simultaneously” (2004, 27). Evidently, the successful manager made use of micromanagement as well. However, he was not labelled as a micromanager. We want to emphasize this example to claim that micromanagement can be an effective tool for managers when it is used in fitting situations. Even though the literature on the subject is mainly negative, there is also evidence supporting our claim. This will be further elaborated in the following segment of the theoretical review.

After researching what they called the 10X companies (Southwest airlines, Microsoft, Intel among others), Collins and Hansen (2011) argued that the best leaders had the common denominator of being disciplined, fact-oriented and paranoid. All characteristics often associated with micromanagers. The authors identified a disciplined leadership style within the 10X companies, containing of three core behaviours, namely: fanatic discipline, productive paranoia and empirical creativity (Collins and Hansen 2011, 36-37). Most notably, the 10X companies possess an immense degree of self-discipline. They do whatever is deemed necessary to create outstanding results, regardless of the difficulty. Collins and Hansen describe them as: “*Utterly relentless, monomaniacal even, unbending in their focus on their quest*” (Collins and Hansen 2011, 36-37). Moreover, empirical creativity enables the 10X companies to take bold and creative moves in addition to bounding their risk (Collins and Hansen 2011, 36-37). Finally, the 10X companies constantly take the possibility of things going

wrong into account. They prepare for the unpredictable, exhibiting a productive paranoia by being hyper vigilant not only in bad times, but in calm, stable and positive conditions as well (Collins and Hansen 2011, 36-37).

Bill Gates had written a nightmare memo where he identified possible pitfalls of the company. Furthermore, Herb Keller at Southwest airlines, Andy Grove at Intel and Kevin Sharer at Amgen all had a level of paranoia within them and they all took the worst possible scenarios into account (Collins and Hansen 2011, 36-37). By doing this, they claimed that they were prepared for every outcome that they could possibly face. Obtaining an excessive amount of attention to detail, tracking time of employees and planning work down to the smallest detail can be considered as the more extreme characteristics of micromanagement (Sidhu 2012). Although, from 1972 to 2002 the 10X companies outperformed the comparison companies by more than 30 to 1 (Collins and Hansen 2011, 36-37). Could it be that case that some of the most successful leaders in the world are micromanagers? On the contrary to what theory suggests, the intense and detail-oriented leadership behaviour has had a tremendous effect on their companies placing them at the forefront of the most successful companies during the previous decades.

Some employees can be perceived to be “high-maintenance” by their superiors. These employees need attention, excessive control and an inappropriate amount of influence over others and can as a result of this be portrayed as micromanagers (Chambers 2004). On the positive side, Mike Faith, the founder and CEO of Headsets.com points out that micromanagement can be used favourably. He implements this type of leadership when the company conducts training of their new employees. Firstly, he stays close to the new employees, encouraging and correcting them and thus promoting a learning environment. Faith highlights the importance of being explicit with this leadership style and the expectations. When the new employees reach a certain level of confidence and competence, he will provide them with more space (Knight 2015). However, the perception and attitude of the injured party can sometimes lead to misinterpretation of the intention of an action and label it as micromanagement. What a manager views as support and guidance could by a employee be perceived as excessive control, manipulation and meddling and therefore micromanagement (Chambers 2004,

14). Furthermore, circumstances like disagreements, unwanted intrusion of your workspace and being held accountable can be viewed as micromanagement. When in reality it is in fact, management.

Claiming someone is a micromanager, solely based on the fact that you are dissatisfied with their leadership style does not imply that they are a micromanager (Chambers 2004). However, according to Schynes and Schilling (2013), the actions of a leader, whether destructive or not, can only be what they are perceived to be. Implying that it is not the intention, but the effect of an action that matters and that the negative effects of destructive leadership behaviour or micromanagement is truly only found in the eye of the beholder.

In certain critical situations, Sidhu (2012) claims that a micromanager could help turn southbound projects around and intensify team-work in the short term. Even though micromanagement can be stressful and harmful in a long-term perspective, there exists certain situations where it can be essential and highly effective (Sidhu 2012). Furthermore, in a study about student assignment groups, it was concluded that a micromanagement strategy had a positive effect on eliminating possible problems that could arise from working in groups (Ford and Morice 2003).

Wright presents four suggestions on how to avoid the negative consequences of micromanagement: Being flexible, establishing smarter goals, be result-oriented and behave like a player/coach. Implementing these four factors as a manager has a direct and positive effect on both productivity and job satisfaction, leading to reduced turnover and increased revenues (2000).

White (2010) claims that before removing micromanagement, it must be recognized. On the other hand, one must be cautious about prematurely labelling superiors as micromanagers. It is deemed vital that the right individuals make the right decisions at the right level of the organization. Thus, it is instrumental that the employees that obtain the right skill-level are being empowered by their managers and not micromanaged. If this is not the case, the most talented individuals will eventually leave the organization. When micromanagement is discovered, it is important to promote the right individuals (White 2010, 74). More than likely, in our case it is inevitable that the highly skilled employees will

eventually leave the organization regardless. Hence, the aforementioned high turnover-rates. Constantly dealing with new waves of inexperienced workers, it is crucial to be able to properly manage them to avoid being swept out to the open sea of poorly performing retail stores.

A leader who firmly administer goals and specify how, what and by whom work shall be conducted and emphasizes structure clarifies the employees' role within the organization. This leadership behaviour abates sloppiness, carelessness, negligence and other lackadaisical work behaviours (Holtz and Harold 2013, 494-497). On the other hand, a leader whom extensively implements this leadership behaviour in his or her work creates a counterproductive work environment. However, by limiting this leadership behaviour the result can be the same. Research conducted by Holtz and Harold (2013, 509) reveals a curvilinear relationship between structure and counterproductive work behaviour. Further indicating that a leadership behaviour relying too heavily or sparsely on structure can be destructive. In other words, it is vital for a leader to locate and uphold the balance of micromanagement. Thus, when and where to use micromanagement, or what we define as another tool in a leaders repertoire, is what is intriguing and what is believed in need of further excavation. This has been called a "Reactive Micromanager", a leader whom implements this behaviour when it is deemed necessary (Bouchard 2009).

A research conducted by Raveendhran and Wakslak (2014) states that detail-oriented helpful behaviours did not weaken the perception of a leaders managerial skills. However, dominative and constant micro-managerial behaviour makes the manager seem insecure and showing a lack of leadership skills and authority. Similar to the curvilinear relationship between structure and counterproductive work behaviour as previously mentioned by Holtz and Harold (2013, 509).

For a leader to be able to lead, he or she has to possess a certain level of knowledge about how the employees are conducting their day-to-day tasks. This would be impossible without a certain level of supervision (Liao and Chun 2015). Further it is plausible that if a leader never or rarely supervised or interacted with its subordinates, they would feel overlooked and forgotten. An interactional monitoring leadership style is defined as: "*gathering of subordinate work*

progress or outcome information that involves the solicitation of information directly from subordinates” (Liao and Chun 2015, 4). Interactional monitoring involves gathering employees’ opinion, feedback and expectation about their work environment. Acting in such a manner could further assist collaboration and transparency between management and their subordinates on what is currently working and what needs alteration.

A meta-analysis showed that in schools where the students were achieving above what was anticipated, the leaders were likely to be involved in their subordinates curriculum planning, visiting classrooms and reviewing the students’ work (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe 2008, 667). Thus, showing several similarities with behaviour normally diagnosed with micromanagement. The researchers stated that the leaders’ involvement in their subordinates work enabled them to gather a greater understanding of what needed alteration and what needed not. Further correlating with interactional monitoring and the benefits that follows (Liao and Chun 2015). This leadership style, involving *planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum*, is called instructional leadership (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe 2008, 638, 667). This leadership behaviour had three or four times more of a positive effect on student outcomes than transformational leadership (Robinson 2010, 2; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe 2008, 655). After studying approximately 800 different teachers experience with instructional leadership, it was identified that talking to teachers to promote reflection and promoting personal growth was the two main dimensions enhancing effective instructional leadership (Blase and Blase 1999).

Similarly to Dysvik, Kuvaas and Buch (In press, 15) we believe that a way of elevating the employees obligation of their job is to invest in their development. In contrary to them and what is commonly believed, we suspect, especially in our case concerning the retail industry and its inexperienced employees, that micromanagement can be a beneficial tool in a managers tool-shed.

In summery, it is obvious that micromanagement is widely viewed upon as a plague across the scientific community. However, as presented it is possible that it shares a vast number of characteristics with other well renowned leaderships styles. Whether it is called instructional leadership, interactional monitoring, detail-oriented or structural leadership, we have located traits that they share in

common with micromanagement. This is what we have further excavated in our studies and will present in the following segments of this thesis. When investigating the positive side of micromanagement, we find it necessary to distinguish between a micromanager as a detail oriented, task focusing, monitoring and demanding manager, and the micromanager in the literature whom are assigned almost all the negative traits that exist. With this distinction in mind, we are intrigued to investigate the topic further.

2.3 A complimentary review of High Quality Connections

After completing our interview sessions we discovered an unforeseen element in all of our cases. The managers in the examined stores genuinely emphasized high quality connections and creating a safe and prosperous work environment. Similarly to the behaviour of a micromanager, the examined managers are highly detail oriented when it comes to social interactions. Every small transaction of communication makes a difference. Whether it is a small text message saying “good job” or physically showing gratitude. These managers possess a grandiose arsenal of techniques and procedures when it comes to high quality connections. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to add an abbreviated literature review on the subject.

High quality connections can generate exhilaration, compassion and serenity between two or more individuals (Stephens, Heaphy and Dutton 2011, 3; Turner, Dutton and Ragins 2008, 325-328). High-quality connections have been described as: “...*short-term, dyadic, interactions that are positive in terms of the subjective experience of the connected individuals and the structural features of the connection*” (Stephens, Heaphy and Dutton 2011, 2). A high quality connection has three defining characteristics. These are a *higher emotional carrying capacity*, a *high level of tensility* and a *high degree of connectivity* (Dutton and Heaphy 2003, 266). Meaning that a high quality connection has a higher range of both positive and negative emotions. Individuals that are involved in high quality connections are more likely to have a feeling of vitality, arousal, positive energy and regard, being loved and a feeling of mutuality (Dutton and Heaphy 2003, 267).

According to the author Jane Dutton, workplace incivility is the norm in many organizations with up to 90 per cent of the respondents in a recent poll considering this matter to be a serious problem (2003a, 1). A non-welcoming or even disrespectful workplace environment can be very taxing, taking away the employees' energy and work-motivation, ultimately leading to burnout (Dutton 2003a, 1). As a means to deter workplace incivility, Dutton advocates high-quality connections between co-workers. According to Dutton, respectful engagement between co-workers is one of the best ways to promote these types of connections; "*Respectful engagement empowers and energizes giving individuals a heightened sense of their abilities*" (2003, 2; Dutton 2003b). Furthermore, respectful engagement stimulates interaction and nurtures acceptance and openness. It is only when people respectfully engage each other that the real power of different points of views can be fully utilized (Carmeli, Dutton and Hardin 2015).

Energizing interactions are high-quality connections (Dutton 2003b, 7). Energizing interactions has the potential to create or deplete vital energy. They can create "positive spirals" that leads to more energy and more positive emotions. This can enhance their ability to think, act and in turn increase their capacity and make individuals connect with others, creating further opportunities for energy to spread. These interactions create mutuality and bolster the employees' attachment to their organization. However, interactions are not exclusively positive. The opposite of high-quality connections is what Dutton names corrosive connections, lacking attention, trust and mutual regard. Corrosive connections have destructive effects on both individuals and the organization. Individuals can experience a decrease in their well-being, create stress and difficulties in doing their job. Further resulting in anxiety, depression and emotional exhaustion. At an organizational level, corrosive connections reduce employee's capability, knowledge, motivation, commitment and emotional reserves. They can also be contagious because dissatisfied employee's could end up taking out their pain on others (Dutton 2003b, 8-10).

Dutton also claims that most people have a highly tuned "authenticity detector". If an approach is not deemed genuine it will not result in a high-quality connection, no matter how well-meaning the approach may be (2003a, 3). If a person suddenly

conducts him-/herself in a different manner than what is perceived as normal for that individual it may be confusing and troublesome to consider that specific behaviour as genuine. In other words, people can easily detect when one is speaking from the heart and when one is using a “front” or simply “acting”.

Having stated this, we will now present the methodology section of our thesis.

Part III: Methodology

3.1 Research methodology introduction

Preceding our eventual final settlement on methodology it is deemed reasonable to dwell deeper into the vast universe that is qualitative methodology. Excavating the potential advantages and pitfalls before concluding on a methodology, research design and setting. Van Maanen describes qualitative methodology as: “*an umbrella covering an array of interpretive techniques which seeks to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world*” (1979, 520). This view is supported by Pratt: “*Qualitative research is great for addressing “how” questions, rather than “how many” for understanding the world from the perspective of those studied and for examining and articulating processes*” (2009, 856).

Qualitative research can be compared to how we interpret information as human beings. We try to decipher the true meaning of an action by analysing the tone, body language, overall demeanour etc. of the person we are communicating with or observing. A qualitative researcher tend to be unfamiliar with what the gathered data purport preceding their depiction of the context and the implementation of a framework and analysis (Van Maanen 1979). However, one must not be absent of knowledge about theory regarding similar subjects or research (Suddaby 2006).

A theoretical approach that has been conceived as interesting is that of *practice theory*. It focuses on three different branches of approaches on practice, empirical, theoretical and philosophical, or the what, the how, and why an organization or business behaves the way it does (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011, 1) What practice theory tries to uncover is the “arrows between the boxes” that we can observe in almost every organizational chart or structure map. What is it that produces the “boxes”? Or as Feldman and Orlikowski explains, “*practice theory theorizes the arrows to understand how actions produce outcomes*” (2011, 10). In our case, we ponder if micromanagement is apart of these arrows in the high-performing stores that will be examined.

Equivalently to practice theory, process organization studies retrieve their explanatory data from activities and patterns over time (Langley and Tsoukas

2010, 2, 14-15). Process theory entails the importance of directing the attention towards inter-actions, that “*everything that is has no existence apart from its relation to other things*” (Langley and Tsoukas 2010, 3). Every event, organization or person that participate in an inter-action is forever changed because of it. It is this process that process theorists long to examine. When conducting process organization studies the time frame that the research will be performed in is vital. A phenomenon can be studied in a nostalgic historical sense, by observing the present or by conducting a more longitudinal study (Langley and Tsoukas 2010).

Due to our short time frame, the fitting research design would be what Langley and Tsoukas call “tracing back” or historical research (2010). In our case we are aware of the “outcome” of the high performing retail stores. This presents us with an advantage and the possibility of exploring the procedures that spawn the high performance. Another advantage of being acquainted of the “outcome” is that we are aware that these stores are high-performers and thus what Flyvbjerg calls “critical cases” (2006). Critical cases, or “most likely” and “least likely” cases can be a strategic choice since it greatly enhances the possibility of generalization based upon the research. In the sense that if it applies for this case, it applies to all (no) cases (Flyvbjerg 2006, 230). In our case, we believe that if micromanagement can be successful at the highest performing retail stores, then it can be successful anywhere else.

3.2 Research design and data collection

Here the practical approach on how we conducted our research will be presented. We came to an arrangement with a representative of Steen & Strøm, where he would identify and select two retail stores and one fast food restaurant in their Norwegian shopping malls that are performing very well compared to others in their segment. Steen & Strøm is one of the leading shopping centre companies in Scandinavia with 20 shopping centres in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The 100 million annual visitors spend approximately three billion euros in their 2000 different stores. Steen & Strøm is owned by Klépierre, the leading shopping centre group in Europe, consisting of 179 shopping centres in 16 countries. This cooperation with Steen & Strøm helped us find high performers and provided access to interviews with the managers and employees in the selected stores.

There were conducted three semi-structured interviews per store. We emphasised in our request that the selected stores were primarily operating in different parts of the retail industry, a request the representative of Steen & Strøm had taken into account. The selected stores are high performers in their segments. We will try to identify the use of micromanagement in these stores, showing a positive deviance from today's literature. When all of the interviews were conducted, we compared the findings and tried to identify patterns of similarity. We offered to present our findings back to the stores before we had come to any final conclusions. All the three examined managers were interested in our findings and replied. This exchange of thoughts was done by e-mail. We believe that both parties benefitted from this exchange. We were open to thoughts, theories, insight and feedback from the participants. Together with our prior personal experience with micromanagement and the interviews, this exchange helped us both confirm and sharpen our findings and analysis.

Ensuing the data collection, our objective was to implement a comparative case study design in our interpretation of the research. Normally, it is performed with two contrasting cases (Bryman and Bell 2011, 63). In our research, the contrast was not present in performance, given that all the stores are considered as high performers. However, the contrast was as previously mentioned in the market and customer group that the stores operate in, e.g. a fast food restaurant vs. a high-end fashion store vs. a children's clothing store.

3.3 Constructing grounded theory

The raw data from our research was transcribed and later categorized into reoccurring themes across the different cases. After an extensive analysis of the data there was located numerous common denominators across the different investigated fields within our cases. These patterns and ways of conducting practice were compared across the different cases and then divided into different categories. This procedure is known as coding. Coding is described as “... *the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what that means*” (Charmaz 2014, 113). The method of grounded theory was first created by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory emphasises the importance of getting out in the field and getting to understand

what is going on. Personally witnessing the active roles of persons shaping the world they live in through a process of interactions. Or in other words, the intention of grounded theory is to develop theory that is grounded in data and systematically analysed (Goulding 2002, 40-42). This procedure consists of several steps. Ensuing the interviews and data collection the data is coded and divided into multifarious underlying concepts. Constant comparative coding is done during the research subsequently creating categories, or higher order concepts (Goulding 2002, 77). As already mentioned, this is how we gathered, analysed, coded and have presented our findings.

3.4 Cases and Research setting

Table 1. List of participants

	<i>Case 1: A high-end fashion store</i>	<i>Case 2: A fast food restaurant</i>	<i>Case 3: A children's clothing store</i>
First interviewee	Owner Male. 40 years old.	Restaurant manager Female. 35 years old.	Store manager Female. 26 years old.
Second interviewee	Male dep. Manager Male. 36 years old.	Full-time employee Female. 19 years old.	Assistant store manager Female. 26 years old.
Third interviewee	Female dep. Manager Female. 29 years old.	Part-time employee Female. 20 years old.	Full-time employee Female. 22 years old.

3.4.1 A high-end fashion store

The high-end fashion store has been running for more than twenty years and is one of the most influential fashion stores in the whole country. Over the past years, the store has almost tripled its revenue and has been named the best clothing store in Norway by its peers. The store has a vast number of suppliers and is one of the first fashion stores implementing a RFID system, aiming for total inventory control. They sell both men and women clothes, in addition to accessories. Today, the store has a unique position, in terms of revenue, growth, reputation, customers, and potential employees.

Preceding the interviews, we were given a tour around the store. Concerning Raknes' experience within the retail industry, this tour provided us with numerous insights that later was utilised during the interviews. As part of the high-end fashion store's success they dispose an office that is extensively used for planning and training. The interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the office, thus limiting the external disturbances and providing a favourable environment for recording the interviews. The first interview was with one of the two owners. He

is forty years old and started in the company nineteen years ago as a part-time employee. Over the last ten years, he has owned and ran the company together with his business partner, which also is the CEO.

After having completed the first interview, the CEO sat down with us for fifteen minutes for a small informal chat. He started as a part-time employee as well and has now worked in the company for more than twenty years. He told us the history of the company and how they had located themselves in the unique position that they are today. This conversation handed us a deeper insight in the business and made us able to ask sharper and more specific follow-up questions in the following two interviews. The second and third interviewees were the male and female department manager at the store. As it is a spacious store with several employees, these two are each responsible for their section of the store. They both work full-time at the company and have been there for several years already. The manager for the male department is a thirty-six-year-old man. Additionally, he is working with procurement of new collections and is in charge of their innovative RFID logistic and inventory system. He has worked in the company for five years. However, before he was hired he was a regular customer of the store himself, being a personal acquaintance of both the owners. The last interviewee at the high-end fashion store was a twenty-nine-year-old woman who has worked in the company as a department manager for the female half of the store for three years. Her background is from the clothing industry and she has formerly worked as a store manager in a well-known male clothing store chain.

3.4.2 A fast food restaurant

The fast food restaurant is part of one the largest burger-chains in the world, with approximately fifty restaurants in Norway. All the restaurants look identical and are supposed to serve exactly the same food and offer exactly the same service. Despite this, our selected restaurant has with the same manager been awarded “best in test” for almost ten years. In three of these years they were named the restaurant of the year in Norway, in addition to winning several service prizes at their resided shopping mall.

The interviews were conducted in a meeting room that is available to all employees and stores at the mall. Firstly, we interviewed the store manager that

had a lot on her mind concerning her leadership style. Furthermore, she had almost twenty years of tenure in the fast-food chain working her way up from a part-time employee to a franchise owner. The contrast was vast compared to the two next interviewees. The second interviewee was a 20-year-old part-time employee that has worked at the restaurant since she was fifteen and had adopted a lot of her store manager's views on how to run the business. Lastly, we interviewed a 19-year-old girl that has worked at the restaurant for less than a year. Her answers were short, on the other hand she provided us a different angle and a unique opportunity to observe the training of a new employee on a first hand basis. Additionally, she provided support to a lot of our findings from the other interviews. Hence of the short answers from the younger girls, we had to ask a lot of direct follow-up questions.

3.4.3 A children's clothing store

This children's clothing store is located in one of the busiest shopping malls in Norway. It is a part of an international chain with approximately two hundred stores. For three consecutive years this store's revenue has set a new international record. The store manager has won numerous prizes and she has been offered higher ranked administrative jobs in the company. However, she loves the daily contact with her employees and customers and has turned down the offers. Instead, she hunts new all-time highs with her high-performing team.

We interviewed the store manager, the assistant store manager and a full-time employee. Similarly to the other cases they had booked a meeting room in advance. Providing us, yet again with a favourable environment for conducting interviews. The store manager used over fifteen minutes answering our first warm-up question. Thus, we had to alter the interview guide a little, reducing the number of follow-up questions. The interview was going along greatly. However, we were disturbed in the latter parts of the interview, because the room was only booked for one hour. Therefore, we had to quickly change location and the interview carried on for twenty more minutes. The store manager is a twenty-six-year-old woman who has worked in the company for six years. She has prior experience from other retail and clothing companies.

The second interviewee was a twenty-two-year-old girl that only had worked in the company for one year. Despite of this, she already loves her job. With a mother whom has spent her whole career running her own retail store, she also has the ambition of being her own boss one-day. Our third and last interviewee, the assistant store manager, had to leave work early because of illness the day of the interview and we had to reschedule. The assistant store manager is a twenty-six-year-old Swedish girl who have lived in Norway since 2010. She has worked at the children's clothing store for two years. Her interview was rescheduled and conducted later the same week.

3.4.4 In General

In every single interview we were facing the interviewees creating a formal standardised “interview setting”. Bergstrøm was the one conducting the interview, while Raknes observed and provided follow-up questions in the latter parts of the interviews. Thus limiting the insider/outsider complication given Raknes' career background in the retail industry. This will be further elaborated later in methodology section of the paper. Each and every single interviewee was given a chocolate treat preceding the interview as a token of gratitude towards them taking the time to conduct the interviews. Given that some of the interviewees were young and nervous about the process, this helped break the tension and create a safe and informal atmosphere where they were comfortable with sharing information with us. Most interviews were conducted during their workday. However, some of the interviewees also used their spare time, which we specifically notified our gratitude towards preceding the interview.

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed to insure that the gathering of information was properly conducted. The data was then thoroughly scrutinized and compared. The similarities were then divided into categories. This will be further elaborated in the findings section of the thesis.

3.5 Interviewing

In qualitative interviewing, the aim is to get rich and detailed answers. The main focus is on the interviewee's point of view. Qualitative interviewing can be flexible and the interviewer can be rather free from the schedule, generating new questions, follow-up questions and follow-up interviews. When a research is fairly

clear in its focus, like ours, semi-structured interviews are normally preferred (Bryman and Bell 2011). They have the potential of generating both rich and detailed insights from the interviewee's experiences and are flexible enough to follow interesting areas during the interview which was not planned beforehand (Goulding 2002, 59). Semi-structured interviewing is usually based on a list of questions on a rather specific topic. This list is often called an interview guide (Bryman and Bell 2011). When constructing an interview guide, it is crucial to construct the questions in a order that enables the researchers to gather a valuable insight in the interviewees social world, and at the same time facilitate flexibility (Bryman and Bell 2011). We purposely adhered to Kvale's recommendation of constructing short questions that are easy to understand (1996, 130).

Table 2. The four phases in our interview guide

<i>Question phases</i>	<i>Specifics</i>
P1: Initiation and warm up phase	General questions concerning the interviewees' life. Trying to create an informal atmosphere where the interviewee is comfortable and relaxed. A small token of appreciation was given to the interviewees to show our gratitude towards them taking their time and to lighten the mood.
P2: Eliciting extended storytelling	Open-ended questions excavating the cases for their daily activities and stories of success. E.g. can you describe a normal day/week at your job? Can you tell us about a successful campaign?
P3: Directed questions, comparative	Questions trying to uncover the use of micromanagement. E.g. how active is your closest manager in your everyday activities? To what degree do you focus on execution and follow-up on everyday assignments?
P4: Closure and sharing	Questions regarding us recapping our findings. Here we wanted to confirm the assumptions we gathered during the interview. E.g. have we understood you correctly....?

Our interview guide, (appendix 1) consist of four phases: warm up, storytelling, directed questions and closure. In the warm up section, getting the formalities right is a main priority. In addition, rather easy and informal questions are asked to connect and make the interviewee comfortable and ready. In the second part of the interview, we wanted to hear stories of day-to-day activities and stories of success. We were not looking for generalizations. On the other hand, concrete experiences with specific activities was what we were looking for (Charmaz 2014, 68-70). The third part of the interview consists of more concrete and direct questions, aiming at an effort of digging deeper into our research topic. Finally, in the latter part of the interview, one can share interpretations and test out theory. Is there a common understanding of what is said? Throughout the interview process

we acted accordingly to Czarniawska's advice for facilitating the production of narratives, establishing characters and plots, in addition to giving the interviewees' room to speak (2014).

We began the interviews with presenting ourselves and the purpose of the interview, providing a context and frame for the interview (Kvale 1996, 127-128). However, we purposely did not reveal too much about the research or Raknes' background in the industry, information that could influence the interviewee (Fontana and Frey 1994, 367). Moreover, we treated the interview as a conversation, being informal and using humour. However, we also wanted to be perceived as professionals and ensured confidentiality (Mishler 1986; Kvale 1996). The goal with this behaviour was a gain trust in the very start of the interview, which is essential to succeed (Fontana and Frey 1994, 367).

During the interview sessions our questions were heavily weighted towards how the different cases operated in their day-to-day operations. We wanted each piece of information to be backed up by an example or a story of when it happened. We asked about how a normal day of work was, a normal week, everyday routines, campaigns, training of new employees, superior supervision, testing and so forth. We gave the interviewees the possibility of gathering their thoughts and exploring their options before presenting us with their answers. Constantly insuring that we received stories and examples on the matters (Charmaz 2014, 68-70). In some interviews we experienced the interviewees as extra insightful, establishing a mutual understanding on exciting issues. In the end of those interviews we went out of the interview guide and tested some thoughts and theories. These respondents were even further involved when later asked to comment and discuss our findings, providing the interviewees with a larger role in our research, as suggested by Mishler (1986).

3.6 Personal experience with micromanagement

Both writers of this paper have prior experience with micromanagement. Raknes started his own company six years ago, and is today running two well-established clothing stores for men. Both stores have won service tests, where their score is located at the top of the national level. The stores have experienced a continuous growth in costumers and revenue over the past six years. In the effort of

maintaining the high requirements of service and visual appearance in the stores, techniques of micromanagement have been a central part of the daily operations.

3.7 Insider/outsider complication

With Raknes' on-going experience and relationship with Steen & Strøm, we had to deal with the possible insider/outsider complication. Throughout the research, the prior experience has been an advantage. Gaining access into an organization and schedule interviews can often be challenging. Another potential struggle is to understand the language and culture of the respondents (Fontana and Frey 1994, 366-367). Both of these obstacles were minimalized as a result of Raknes' inside knowledge regarding the industry. However, during the interviews, Bergstrøm was the interviewer, while Raknes was observing. In this way, we facilitated a more open-minded interview. Raknes simultaneously used his prior knowledge to come up with relevant questions during the latter parts of the interview. Holstein and Gubrium labels this type of background knowledge as an invaluable recourse when interviewing, assisting the interviewees to easier put words on their thoughts and experiences (1995, 45). Additionally, Kvale emphasises the importance of having proper knowledge about the investigated matter (1996, 147).

Numerous additional advantages were obtained from this style of interviewing. While one individual conducted the interview the other could carefully observe the reactions of the interviewee and take notes. Thus being able to analyse the interview and await the appropriate time to intervene with supporting or leading questions locating desired findings (Bryman and Bell 2011, 474). Further, more interviewers can create a more informal setting, making the interviewee comfortable and more willing to share insights.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The participants were volunteering, even though the interviews were arranged through Steen & Strøm. We ensured all participants of their confidentiality. Cooper and Schindler suggest three guidelines to protect the rights of the participants. First, explaining the study benefits. The benefit should not be presented, overstated, nor understated. However, it should motivate the participants to answer truthfully. Secondly, explaining the rights and protection of the participants. Finally, obtain an informed consent (2014). Therefore, before we

began the interviews, the participants would orally confirm a consent securing their rights. The consent also encompassed the acceptance of audio recording the interview. The audio recordings have been deleted after they were fully transcribed, and the transcriptions will not be used for any other reasons than this thesis.

Part IV: Findings

4.1. Emerging practices from research study

Numerous iterating practices were located in our empirical analysis. Grandiose attention to details, affirmation of completion of tasks, testing and surveillance of their employees and an immense degree of control was identified in all instances. In our analysis we found that even though the managers could be deemed painstakingly meticulous with control and supervision they showed the same degree of attention towards employee satisfaction, development and knowledge sharing. Remarkably, all the subordinates we interviewed expressed to admire and respect their bosses, despite their high attention to detail, close monitoring and follow-up.

We divided our findings into different six categories, each including one or more coherent practices. All six categories include rich empirical evidence from our three cases. We have chosen to present each category and the corresponding practises, followed by the findings from our nine interviews. We finish each category with a summary, including what is deemed the greatest contribution to the stores' high performance, together with what we consider to be most controversial and challenging.

Table 3. The six categories

Categories	Definition	Empirical Evidence
<i>Rigours attention to detail and external appearance</i>	The category of rigorous attention to detail and external appearance mainly concerns the physical state of the store. Additionally, an enormous focus on detailed completion of tasks is a part of this category. The category includes several practices that have to be regularly executed in order to maintain a spotless, welcoming and inspiring store. The store managers have a rigours attention to details, constantly maintaining a strict and controlling regime. There are numerous rules to follow and the managers are obsessed of keeping their store clean and tidy. Every single detail is important in upholding a constant attractive external appearance.	Highly visible in all our three cases.
<i>Meticulous planning, execution & follow-up</i>	The practice of meticulous planning, execution and follow-up consists of all the processes and practises used to ensure an excellent customer service and experience. Meticulous planning is the fundament for the stores' great achievements. Campaigns are planned several months in advance. The managers come in early to work, prepping and planning the day. Our most extreme case is the manager at the fast food restaurant who starts her day four hours before the mall open. To-do-lists are actively used to secure execution and completion of tasks. Both employees and assignment are closely followed up. The feedback is constant and instantaneous.	Highly visible in all our three cases.
<i>Strict financial and logistical control</i>	The category of strict financial and logistical control mainly consists of an urging need to obtain a tremendous level of control on all the financial and logistical numbers of the retail store. The practice is comprised of behaviours such as checking the employee's sales during the entire day of work and before going to sleep, comparing historical sales, frequently counting the inventory and so forth. The storages have to be in perfect order sorted by sizes with perfectly folded edges.	The high-end fashion store is the most devoted practitioner of this category. Both the other cases have a strict logistical control. The fast food restaurant has close support in dealing with the finances, and uses little time on the matter.

Categories	Definition	Empirical Evidence
<i>Surveillance and testing</i>	The category of surveillance and testing consists of an almost paranoid level of supervision and confirmation of knowledge and skill level. This constitutes behaviour such as getting acquaintances to go undercover into the stores to check upon the service level and tidiness of the store, personally monitor the store outside of work, testing their knowledge level on the merchandise and purposely hiding or placing unwanted objects or leaving dust untouched to see if it gets taken care of by the employees.	Surveillance is most visible at the fast food restaurant. However, it is also evident at the children's clothing store. The practice of surveillance was only indirectly identified at the high-end fashion store. In all our three cases we discovered several different methods of testing the employees and their knowledge.
<i>Comprehensive training and never-ending learning</i>	The category of comprehensive and thorough training involves a scrutinizing step-by-step training method where the new employees are monitored, controlled and given basic work assignments before gradually becoming increasingly more independent. All the managers have worked them selves up from part-time positions and wish for their employees to make the same journey. With new products arriving all the time, obtaining knowledge is demanded and new sales techniques are frequently tested. The demand for product knowledge is supreme, making the information flow and knowledge sharing key practices.	This is a key category in all three cases where we found a lot of empirical evidence showing practices of training, learning and knowledge sharing.
<i>Social modelling and caregiving</i>	The category called "Social Modelling and Caregiving" consists of several practices that incorporate a celestial drive to ensure a safe and prosperous work atmosphere for the employees. At the children's clothing store the employees hug each other when arriving and leaving work. At the high-end fashion store they label themselves as a family. The managers are hard working role models. The employees respect and admire them, and some actually aspire to be like their leaders.	Another key category identified in all three cases. The practice of caregiving is extreme in the fast food restaurant and the children's clothing store. The empirical evidence show employees deeply respecting and appreciating their bosses.

4.2 Rigorous Attention to Detail & External Appearance

The practice of rigorous attention to detail and external appearance includes a high number of processes, which has to be conducted in a pre-designated order. These processes are often done regularly, daily, weekly or even monthly. The managers with all their experience and success in mind tailor these processes and the order of them. To manage details is the definition of the word micromanager. Because of their strict regime and controlling demeanour, a micromanager is often called a perfectionist. All the managers we interviewed can easily be associated with the terminology of a perfectionist. Two of them spilled it straight out by themselves.

“Yeah, I would consider myself a perfectionist”!

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

The managers display rigorous attention to their stores external appearance, constantly maintaining orderly, inspiring and visually attractive stores. Combined with their high level of attention to details, the managers use several hours every day upholding the stores desired appearance.

“We have our morning routine where we work to maintain a high standard in our store. It’s all about the visual aspect of things. We divide the tasks of cleaning, restocking and making everything look nice and so forth. It’s important that everything is on point at all times”

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The details are of utmost importance when preserving clean, attractive and appealing stores. The practice of keeping a clean and neat store consists of numerous tedious and monotonous tasks. Nonetheless, all of our three cases showed a great dedication, focus and willingness to perform these monotonous assignments every day.

“The cleaner, more orderly and appealing our store looks, the more welcoming it appears for the customers. I believe a tidy, neat and orderly store is crucial. The job we do before the customers arrive is critical. For instance, when we build a new wall display, we always think in outfits. Making it easier for the customer to see what fits together. Which t-shirt goes to that pair of jeans, and so on”.

Full-time employee – A children’s clothing store

After being presented this category, the manager at the fast food restaurant wanted to emphasize the importance of rigorously following the pre-decided concept and all its rules and details. She also wanted to add that her employees actually feel

safe relating to strict rules and routines. The owner at the high-end fashion store believes that this category is key concerning their high performing culture. Moreover, he states that employees who do not fit this culture often quit by themselves. After also acknowledging this category, the manager at the children`s clothing store wanted to point to the fact that they simultaneously grant the employees a lot of freedom.

4.2.1 A high-end fashion store

We located a rigorous attention to detail and external appearance in all three of our cases. Yet, the focus on details and external appearance at the high-end fashion store was at another level and could be classified close to paranoia.

“We have to differentiate ourselves from others to make sure that the customers come to us instead of our competition. It’s all about the external appearance, the music, the people and the packaging. Making sure our Instagram, Facebook and social media profiles look sharp. There is a whole lot of work being put into that. For instance, we have worked a lot with our shopping bags, we wanted to have the best looking shopping bag in town. We want the customer to feel comfortable when they are in our store. It has to smell good, feel good, sound good and so forth, make it an experience. If that costs a little bit extra, we are willing to cover that expense”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

To keep the external appearance as close to perfect as possible at all times, each day begins with the same routine, mainly consisting of cleaning and restocking. During the weekends, all attention aims toward the customers and sales. For them to be able to do this, every other kind of assignments has to be completed before Friday afternoon:

“.... At 7 o`clock on a Friday there is never something that has to be done. The store has to be at a 100%. On Monday thru Wednesday there can be some assignments like restocking and so forth. But from Thursday thru Saturday the employees have to show a 100% focus on the customer. They normally do, that is what they are trained to do. We don` t want any deliveries these days either. It is all about the store and the appearance”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

Inspiring and good looking displays is not enough; they have to sell as well. When items are not selling sufficiently, they get moved straight away, which witnesses a high attention to details:

“Every Monday in our meetings we go thru which displays that work and don’t. We immediately change those who do not work”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

The manager in the male department explained that to maintain a inspiring and tidy store, you have to get your hands dirty. There are a lot of dull tasks. However, they are absolutely necessary:

“In (our town) there is a rumour going around that (store name) is a cool place to work at. It is not supposed to be cool. It’s a lot of work, a lot of inventory and a lot of “crappy” work, right? I don’t want them to be too cool for that. I give them a lot of specific work assignments. I get furious if they haven’t restocked. If I come to work the next the day and see that they haven’t done what there are supposed to I’ll let them know. They always have concrete assignments handed to them. I think that’s very important”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

During a tour around the store, Raknes noticed that there were fewer items of each style in the female department on the second floor, as well as lower stacks at the tables. When asking about the observation, the store manager confirmed a higher attention to details at the second floor:

“... Yes, that’s correct. We want the women’s department to be a little more fashionable. Fewer of each item, maximum one per size. We want the customer to get the sensation of exclusivity”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

4.2.2 A fast food restaurant

The rigorous attention to details is no secret at the fast food restaurant:

“Yes, we have a whole lot of routines. A bible as we call it. Where everything is set. In what order should the items be on the burger and when can we put it there. There are rules on absolutely everything”.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

The store manager possesses a tremendous attention towards detail; every burger has to be perfect, every single time:

“...If I see that there isn’t mayo on the edge of the bun, I will let them know. I am not afraid to tell them. To me, the condiments have to be exact on the millimetre”.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

To make sure that every burger is perfect, she has hung up several notes in the kitchen:

“We have notes on the kitchen where every single step of each burger is explained to the letter. Every time a new burger is introduced, a new note is hung up to help us make it correctly”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The full-time employee is confirming the rigorous attention to detail:

“If you do it the wrong way, she’ll let you know. However, not in a strict way. She is good at standing beside me and say: “No, you have to do it this way, not that way”. She is consistent. I have been corrected many times”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

Perfection is of highest importance, yet you have to be fast as well:

“You have to be fast and the burger must be perfect every time. You are supposed to taste all the ingredients in every single bite. If you don’t, she’ll let you know that it’s too much of this or too little of that. I was corrected a lot in the beginning”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

In addition to making perfect burgers, the fast food restaurant pays very close attention to its external appearance. They are almost manic in their cleaning routines, keeping both the kitchen and the dining area spotless:

“The restaurant has to always look good. We have to look good. The uniforms should be all white, the guys shaved etc.”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

“We have a core focus on holding the restaurant clean. We go around the restaurant every fifteen or thirty minutes. If we see someone leaving, we go and clean their table straight away”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

To keep control over all the different maintenance and cleaning, the store manager has made a to-do-list that contains all of the different places, machines and tings to clean. This list has to be completed every week:

“We have a to-do-list, containing of a lot of different cleaning assignments. The list is different for each day, because we know for instance, that a Monday is less busy than a Friday. On Mondays, we take care of the more demanding tasks like cleaning all the walls in the kitchen”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The store manager has managed to pass over her passion for a clean and tidy restaurant to her employees. Both the full-time and the part-time employee mentioned at clean restaurant as important factors of their success:

“I believe it’s very important that the restaurant looks clean and inviting. If the restaurant was full of waste and the employees was wearing dirty uniforms, not setting up their hair and so on. Then, I think many of our customers would have turned around at the door. I believe keeping the restaurant clean is our most important task”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

“We are known for having high quality in what we do, as well as using good commodities. It’s a result of our very strict rules in our kitchen and at the cashier. Cooking times and cleaning are of the highest importance to us. Together, I believe this reflects our success. We put a lot of effort into pleasing our customers”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The part-time employee displayed an especially high attention to details and the external appearance. Her insights and thoughts displayed a lot of experience.

“Everyone is supposed to have an extra uniform at work. If you get spilled on, you can change into clean clothes. However, if you don’t have an extra uniform, then you have to stay at the back making burgers. You can’t stand in the front, full of ketchup. How messy would the customer think our kitchen was then?”

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

4.2.3 A children’s clothing store

Exactly as in the fast food restaurant, the manager at the children’s clothing store identifies herself as a perfectionist:

“I am a perfectionist, just ask the girls. They know the routines and what is expected of them at work”.

Store manager – A children clothing’s store

She starts every day three hours before the store opens, making sure that she maintains total control and that every detail is at place.

“Actually, my workday is supposed to start at 9.00. However, I come to work 7.00 every day. That is something I have chosen by myself. The head office has told me many times that I don’t have to be at work before 9.00. Nonetheless, I’m a person who likes to start the day at 7.00, filling up the shelves and getting ready for a new day”.

Store manager – A children clothing’s store

She uses the hours before opening to restock and prepare the store for the day. In addition, she goes through what happened the day before. Who sold the most, what was the best-selling item and so on. She also assesses the different displays, which items are selling, and which are not:

“We have categorized the product placements in the store into A, B and C positions. I go through the A-positions every morning. Which items is selling? Which one is not? If one item is selling well, I often order four more boxes. At the same time, maybe another item is selling slightly less, with a much better gross profit? Then you have to do something with the merchandising of that item. Change on a mannequin, post a picture on Instagram or Facebook, or come up with a competition”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

It is not only the store manager who starts her day early. Both the assistant store manager and the full-time employee begin their workday before they have to:

“When I’m opening the store, I arrive two hours before opening. I put on the music and turn up the volume, while washing the floor and dusting. I go through the best-sellers, what products we shall receive and the numbers from yesterday. I always get the sales on a text message from the one who is closing the store. However, I like to check if the girls have had any additional sales. Who sold the most and so on”.

Assistant store manager – A children’s clothing store

I begin every morning thirty to sixty minutes before the store opens by mopping the floors until they’re spotless.

Full-time employee – A children’s clothing store

In parallel to the high-end clothing store, the external appearance of the children’s clothing store is of the utmost importance. The assistant store manager told us that they usually rearrange the physical appearance of the store every day. They are actually so good at changing the displays that the customers think that the store gets more new arrivals than they actually do:

“We focus a lot on the appearance of our store. If there is one shirt that is not selling well, then we find a new position for it. Often when customers ask if we have been delivered new clothes, we have to tell them that we have only rotated the positions. I think this is very important. Making the store fresh and appealing to the customer”.

Assistant store manager – A children’s clothing store

The full-time employee told us an interesting story from when she was building a new wall-display preparing the national day campaign:

“We got this super nice poster of our national attire. So, I built a new wall-display around the poster. I sent a picture of the display to my boss. She said it was very nice, however it was in violation of the rules. I had to take it down again. There are a lot of rules. The clothes have to hang straight underneath each other. If they hang slightly obliquely, it gets altered. Not because my boss doesn’t like it, but because it’s against the rules. The wall-display has to be tight, neat and with straight lines. The colours should preferably cross each other. It’s not allowed with a pair of pants above another. The same rule applies for sweaters. We are always supposed to think in regard of outfits. And, if it’s three times three fronts on the wall, you should never put in one extra. It always needs to be properly done”.

Full-time employee – A children’s clothing store

The attention to detail is extremely high, and there are a lot of rules to take into consideration. The assistant store manager is confirming the strict rules:

“We have a lot of rules concerning the building of walls. For instance, there must never be two side-folded items next to each other. We can use two shelves. However, two sideway racks are not permitted. There must be balance in the wall. There are supposed to be color-codes and the outfits have to match. Few customers are buying two dresses and one sweater. However, a dress, a sweater and tights, that is more common”.

Assistant store manager – A children’s clothing store

At the same time as the attention to details and external appearance is sky-high, the managers are fully aware of their challenges and limitations, being located at one of the busiest shopping malls in the whole country:

“We have a huge store and a lot of customers. It’s challenging to keep the store tidy with nice folded edges and so on. We have that in mind when we are building new tables-displays. You want the table to look cool by using some fancy folding techniques. However, in our store, it is too busy. Therefore, we have to keep it simple, avoiding unnecessary messy tables”.

Assistant store manager – A children’s clothing store

The store also has to look sharp at all time, also when new clothes are delivered. To secure the desired external appearance, there is a lot of rules and details to take into account when receiving new deliveries:

“New products are usually delivered around noon. The number of boxes ranges from one to twelve. We are not allowed to stand by the counter while unpacking the new products. Then we would be turning our backs to the customers. We place all the boxes together as discreetly as possible. We don’t want our store to look chaotic or messy. One box is opened at a time. When a box is empty, it’s folded together and placed in a shopping cart. When all the boxes are folded together, we take the shopping cart to

the garbage. It has to be tidy at all times”.

Full-time employee – A children’s clothing store

4.2.4 Summary

Rigorous attention to detail and the stores external appearance was detected in all of our three cases. Both the high-end fashion store and the children’s clothing store begin their day with mopping the floors and restocking the shelves. Clothes are folded perfectly and the stores are made ready to receive their first customer early in the morning. At the fast food restaurant, every machine is put together, the commodities are prepped, temperatures are controlled etc. These are all strict routines that are repeated every single day, regardless of whom is opening the stores. It may seem boring, however it is revered as necessary to maintain the managers desired high visual standards. We believe as long as the leaders themselves perform these recurring, dull and tedious tasks, the employees will most likely understand the importance of them and continue executing them.

At the fast food restaurant the employees partake in cleaning rounds in the restaurant every fifteen minutes. When a customer leaves, the table has to be disinfected and sorted instantly. In both of the clothing stores, new boxes of clothes have to be handled one of the time, creating as little mess as humanly possible. The employees take pride in working in clean and extraordinary beautiful stores. However, the risk of getting unmotivated by the tedious tasks is always present. It surely is more exciting to sell clothes than to mop the floor.

We identified a rigorous attention to detail in every single store. The interviews uncovered strict rules on almost everything. At the fast food restaurant, they have what they call a bible that they have to obey. At the children’s clothing store, they have a massive guide on how to do their merchandising and on how to build wall displays and tables. The high-end fashion store has no formalized bible or guide. However, they are probably the most zealous when it comes to details and keeping an immaculate store. A colossal number of rules that has to be followed can be deemed a contrast to how one normally would develop passionate, innovative and autonomous employees. A manager has to find and maintain a certain balance, something we sense that our cases have successfully accomplished. We believe that composing teams who honour the rules and the

required levels of detail is vital to continue and ensure high performance. The interviews also revealed that the strict rules made employees feel safe regarding their work place and ancillary assignments.

4.3 Meticulous Planning, Execution & Follow-up

The practice of meticulous planning, execution and follow-up consists of all the processes and practises used to ensure top-quality customer service and experiences. Everything in the store is designed to be perfectly in order the moment a customer walks in the door. Planning and preparation are key practices at all three of our cases. Their highly successful campaigns are planned months in advance. They are constantly communicating and have regular meetings where historical numbers and activities are scrutinized and taken into account when planning and preparing their future endeavours. The managers in all three stores begin their workday before their employees making sure that everything is prepared and ready when the customers arrive.

“I show up at work around six am. Then I open up the kitchen and activate every machine, prepare all the food and make everything ready for the rest of the day”.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

When handing out assignments and challenges to the employees they are envisioned to be properly conducted the first time around. To ensure the appropriate execution of tasks, to-do-lists are actively used by all three of our cases. The children’s clothing store has taken it even further, in addition to using a traditional to-do-list, they have implemented an interactive app for mobile devices, securing both completion of tasks and follow-up.

“I have a to-do-list. I either write it down, or communicate it verbally. We use different techniques to delegate the tasks. My boss would say: “You do this, while you do that, and so on”. However, I often ask who wants to do what. When it’s busy, I can also say that I would like the ones who is best at the various tasks to perform them. I usually end up with task that no one wants”.

Assistant store manager – A children’s clothing store

All of the three stores managers closely follow up their employees. In addition to control that an assignment is properly executed, our interviewees tell us that they

desire to learn from their wrong doings. These potential lessons are often unveiled from constant feedback and the close follow-up.

“Every week we go thru how the employees did with their assigned tasks. If they didn’t complete them, we want to know why. Did you work smart enough, fast enough or hard enough? What was the reason? If something more important happened, it is okay. However, one cannot stand there on a Friday without having done all of your work. That’s not an option. Then you just have to work more. Come in earlier or leave later. Our demands are hard, but it helps them develop as well”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

After being shown this category, the manager at the fast food restaurant told us that preparation is everything in her eyes. She also recognizes this with her employees, whom themselves chooses to start their workday earlier, only to ensure that everything is prepared properly before the restaurant opens. Stressing the fact that the employees do not get paid for starting earlier.

“I believe the foundation for a successful day is having everything at place and in order before the doors open”.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

The owner at the high-end fashion store found this category to be very important, stating that they use a lot of time on how the employees should prioritize their time. The manager at the children’s clothing store recognized all these practices as parts of their daily routines, having several examples to show for.

4.3.1 A high-end fashion store

At the high-end fashion store, planning is a central part of their habitual activities, both in a short-term and in a long-term perspective. Their Mondays always start with the same routine, going through the store, planning and delegating assignments.

“At the store, we have a routine every Monday, when we are a lot of people at work, where we physically go thru the whole store with a pen and paper and divide assignments and restocks throughout the rest of the week”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

During the quieter periods of the year, planning, preparation and facilitation is important:

“There’s a whole lot of planning and traveling in January and February when it comes to exhibitions and procurement. Financially, March is one of our worst months. However, logistically it’s a very challenging month. This is when all our merchandise starts coming in. We are pricing swimming suits and preparing for the summer. Winter is being packed away. Then we have to prepare for the 17th of May, wedding season, festival season and conformation season. So there is a whole lot of focus on suits and preparing for what’s coming. The logistical amount of work is very high. Then we have to price the merchandise, divide the merchandise, build the store and make it look visually good. Make it tempting for the customers, if you know what I mean?”

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The larger and more important campaigns are planned up to six months in advance. Enabling the managers to ensure good deals and facilitate their future success:

“We like to plan our campaigns approximately six months ahead. To make sure that we get the merchandise as cheap as possible, prepare the suits, and locate fabric on sale. Mostly all our items are bought in advance, trying to get the best deals we can possibly get. Take pictures of every single item for our blog and social media. We put a whole lot of effort into that. We turn the entire store on its head preceding the campaign, making everything look as good as possible”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

When working in a retail store, execution is a tremendous challenge. Constantly working with several pending tasks, while simultaneously being interrupted by customers or more important and urgent assignments. Uncompleted tasks are therefore a well-known phenomenon in the retail industry. To ensure the proper execution and completion of tasks, all of our three cases use to-do-lists. At the high-end fashion store, all three interviewees mentioned the use these lists. When being asked of an example of the content, the manager in the female department answered:

“The to-do-list can consist of anything from re-arranging a part of the store, clean the jeans wall, pricing items and organize the inventory and so forth. If they feel that anything needs to be added to the list, they are more than welcome to do so. It helps them with getting more ownership of the to-do-list. Not so much now because everyone does their work, but previously I have walked around the store and checked off on the list and written down the name of the person responsible of the assignment to check if the work was done. But it totally depends on the employee if it is necessary or not”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

We also asked her if she checked that the assignments at the to-do-list were completed. She explained:

“..Oh yeah, I follow up my employees. For instance last night when I left, it’s crucial for me to check the numbers and see what assignments have been done or not. If it haven’t be done, why? Then I check the numbers, if there has been a lot of customers, OK, that’s a good thing. Then I understand that there haven’t been time to do everything. If the numbers are low, then I raise a large question mark concerning that. So that kind of follow-up I do all the time. If they are doing well I’m always quick to tell them so. I can send them a text and say good job you were the salesman of the week and so on. I always check yesterday’s numbers, last week’s numbers, I’m crazy about numbers”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

Even though the high-end fashion store can be deemed meticulous in their level of planning, execution and follow-up, they both analyse and search for natural explanations when exercises are left uncompleted. They wish to know what happened and urge to learn from it.

4.3.2 A fast food restaurant

At the fast food restaurant, planning and preparations was mentioned as one of the most important parts of their success by all three of the interviewees. The store manager starts each day almost four hours before opening, doing the prepping for the entire day. Her immense recognition of the advantage of these preparations has carefully transferred over to her employees who start the day by counting the commodities ensuring that they have enough for the day. She elaborated further:

“I put together the machines and start them up. I check the temperatures and double check that all the machines are up and running. I take note of it in a book, where we have a checklist regarding food security, temperatures etc. When everything is at place, I eat my breakfast. I check one last time that everything is in order, take the temperature on the meat, deep fryer and other products. Finally, now we are ready to welcome the customers”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The store manager has constructed a sheet making it easier for the less experienced employees to utilize her knowledge and experience:

“Preparation is very important. If we do not prepare well enough, we have to do it in the middle of the day. When we prepare, it lasts the entire day. We have a sheet that states how much to prepare considering the budgeted

sales. If the budget is 60.000, we prepare for 60.000 or maybe 65.000, because we know we are in a good period. Preparation is crucial”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

In busy periods and during large campaigns, the planning is stricter and the focus on prepping and execution is at its maximum. To be able to perform perfectly and according to the desired pace, the employees are operating in the workstations where they are deemed most efficient:

“On Saturdays and Sundays in December, we are well aware of the all the customers we are going to serve. Therefore, we are well prepared. We have a lot of people at work and everyone knows what to do. You know it’s going to be busy, so we do a pre-production of the products we can do that with. When we have the opportunity to catch our breath, we refill everything as fast as we can. If not, the next rush is going to make the restaurant fall into utter chaos. It’s very important that everybody is doing their tasks, even though we only have the best people at work those days. People that are properly trained.”

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The employees are closely monitored, making sure that they understand what was wrong and how to do it the right way:

“If something is not incorrect, we get an e-mail with a picture of what’s wrong, supplementary to a description on how to do it better next time. She is good at doing follow-up’s. If we don’t do things properly, we have to improve ourselves. She pays close attention to everything we do, regardless of the matter”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

Many would think that the close monitoring would be perceived as annoying by the employees. However, the full-time employee has another experience. She told us that she is learning a tremendous amount from the close attention. With both positive and constructive feed back, in addition to praising of extraordinary behaviour, the employees respect and appreciate the manager’s hands-on behaviour:

“My boss is great at being punctual and consistent when giving instructions. No one avoids the instructions. She is good at praising, encouraging and motivating. Every day, there is a list at the office, highlighting the best selling employees. If we have sold well the whole week, one can be named a “super-salesman””.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

4.3.3 A children's clothing store

Comparatively to the high-end fashion store and the fast food restaurant, planning and preparations is an important part of the children's clothing store's success. The assistant store manager explained that they always start planning campaigns with looking through historical numbers:

“When a new campaign is being planned, we start by going through last year numbers. What worked and didn't work last time? How was the campaign carried out? I think we are very good at things like that”.

Assistant store manager – A children's clothing store

The store managers gave us interesting insights in her methods in planning and preparations:

“In August, we contact kindergartens, asking for their equipment lists. Often, the parents first get these lists on the first day of kindergarten. However, if we have these lists in advance and we show them to the customer, then you are more or less guaranteed a huge sale. If you have the list for “Smestadtoppen Barnehage” or “Bamsebo” from this year, and the customer sees it, they ask. What is that? That's her. I take it. Do I need two? Yes! Then I'll take two. And so it goes”.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

Another example is her use Oslo Spectrum's homepage:

“I'm probably one of the most frequent users of Oslo Spectrum's homepage. If something special is happening at Oslo Spectrum, an event or something, then I need more people at work. When Marcus & Martinus are coming this fall, I have to at least double the number of employees during that weekend”.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

The abovementioned examples are examples of meticulous planning months in advance. However, it does not stop there. The store manager also make use of her unique experience and plan for events more than a half year in advance when ordering new collections:

“Last time we had a meeting with the procurement team, I ordered 6 extra boxes of shirts. The person responsible for my region asked if I was crazy, six extra boxes after the 17th of May? Yes, because of Eid. Nobody else in Norway had thought of that. However, in Oslo it is an important date for us”.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

The store manager is highly structured and plans whom she is paying extra attention towards:

“Before I go to work, I always try to go through all my employees. I try to follow-up with a rollover system. Last week, I had extra attention at (employee name), this week I focus on (other employee name), and next week, a new one”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

To facilitate planning and secure execution of tasks, the children’s clothing store has implemented the use of an app called “Smart Coach”. This is an online interactive to-do-list that also secures feedback and follow-up.

“We use something called “Smart Coach”. It’s originally used by athletes such as Therese Johaug. You set goals and evaluate them. All activities planned for the week is assessed the week after. I can comment on the activities of my subordinates, while I also get comments from my own boss. I get reminded of the tasks at hand, and it is easy to do follow-ups. If I was to start up my own store, I would definitely use Smart Coach”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

“When we are using “Smart Coach”, I think some of the girls gets stricken by reality when evaluating themselves. It is easy to think you are doing a great job performing at your best, possibly evaluating yourself as a 6 out of 6. You always think the best of yourself. When I then evaluate them as a 4, beginning to reach for a 5, they get a reality-check. Either, they enhance their performance, or they quit. Maybe it’s a cruel statement, but the ones who quit are persons you don’t need”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

The tool for doing follow-up is actually itself also being followed up, ensuring that everything is on point:

“All employees get a text message every Monday, to remember delivering their “Smart Coach””.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

As we witnessed both at the high-end clothing store and the fast food restaurant, the managers use a lot of time staying close to their employees, guiding them and giving them feedback:

“I’m good at “catching them” in everyday procedures. I don’t wait until the next day. We can take a coffee and five minutes. Then, when we are back in the store, they usually continue in a good mood”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

“I think it’s important to stay close to the employees and not wait too long when you experience problems. I think many leaders do that mistake. They think they can take care of it the next time, or maybe that the situation is not critical enough, or that they don’t want to make too much out of it. So

they stay quiet. However, this often cause frustrations for the other employees, which can then escalate into a bad working environment”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

In addition to the regular follow-up and feedback, the store manager has two annual performance appraisals. However, she never uses it as an excuse for not giving instant feedback. In common with the employees we interviewed at the fast food restaurant, the full-time employee at the children’s clothing store understand the importance of the close attention she gets, and know to utilize it:

“Feedback and follow-up is an important factor in feeling comfortable at work. My previous employer wasn’t especially good at those type of things and the turnover rate was extremely high”.

Full-time employee – A children’s clothing store

“I need feedback and follow-up to keep learning new things. And I want to learn and be better at what I do. I also think that by improving together, our business will keep growing”.

Full-time employee – A children’s clothing store

4.3.4 Summary

Meticulous planning and preparation is heavily used in all three of our cases. While the high-end fashion store includes all their full-time employees and leaders when planning the future, the leader herself does most of the planning at the fast food restaurant. However, the prepping has been passed on to her most entrusted employees as well. The children’s clothing store is a place in between these two extremes. We believe meticulous planning to be one of the most value adding practices in our research. However, not including employees in these key activities prevents learning and can be dangerous because knowledge is not being passed on. By including the employees in planning and preparation, they also get stronger ownership to the store, and are more likely to accept doing bothersome but essential tasks.

Meticulous execution is a necessity in getting all assignments done properly and in a timely fashion. All three stores and their managers are using a to-do-list to ensure completion of their designated tasks. At the fast food restaurant, the to-do-list mainly consists of cleaning assignments and has to be completed every week. Both the high-end fashion store and the children’s clothing store have daily to-do-lists, where the managers prepare the content, which can vary from day to day.

The to-do-list is a practical tool that gives the employees insight as well as a clear understanding of what is most important to get done.

As a result of close leadership and attention directed towards the employees, meticulous follow-up was identified in all nine interviews. The interviewees described a hands-on leadership style with constant feedback in all three stores. At the high-end fashion store and the children's clothing store the managers often took a cup of coffee and a five-minutes chat with their employees, giving feedback and guiding their behaviour. At the fast food restaurant, the manager is even more direct. However, she often use humour and god spirit when giving feedback. All managers agree that it is better to solve a pending issue right away, not sticking it under the carpet and waiting for more issues to pile up. The employees seem to appreciate getting regular feedback, enabling learning and personal growth. Even though the practice of meticulous planning, execution and follow-up evidently is an important part of our cases success, this category brings forth the potential risk of irritating the employees, depriving their autonomy and innovative ideas if not properly conducted.

4.4 Strict Financial & Logistical Control

The practice of strict financial and logistical control mainly consists of an urging need to obtain a tremendous level of control on all the financial and logistical numbers of the retail store. The practice is comprised by behaviour such as checking the employee's sales during the entire day of work and before going to sleep, comparing historical sales, constantly knowing the current inventory to locate potential stealing, filling out lists with what is taken or added to the inventory and so forth.

“Every Tuesday we have a meeting with the store managers. Where we check KPI figures, budgets, numbers, turnover rates etc. A lot of other store mangers don't even know how to calculate basic numbers. I believe that we stand out in that regard”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

The managers are borderline obsessed with numbers and try to pass this passion over to their employees. In addition to their fixation on sales, the managers pay close attention to the inventory. Being able to deliver top performances, all of our three cases are continuously restocking their products. The products shall at all

times be available to both the customers and employees resulting in strict inventory control, frequent inventory counts and tidy storages.

“We count the whole inventory every second or third month, making us one of the clothing stores in Norway with the most frequent inventory counts”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

After being presented the findings and getting insight into the six categories a month after her interview, the manager at the fast food restaurant elaborated further regarding strict financial and logistical control. It is impossible to hide her obsession for sales and numbers. She tells that the employees are especially happy when they have been running around a full restaurant getting sweaty and later get to see the sales rapport going thru the roof.

“We want everyone to ta part in sales and budgets. Every day, we print a list showing each employees’ additional sales. Who is today’s super-salesman? This week? This is always exciting. With the same lists, we compare the sales with last year numbers as well as today’s budget. How many guests did we have today? Did we manage our target for average sale per customer? Everyone likes to look at the sales hour by hour. How well did we perform the last hour? Was it good? Could it have been better? What went wrong?”

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

Both the owner at the high-end fashion store and the manager at the children`s clothing store found strict logistical utterly essential. The same goes for strict financial control, where the high-end fashion store play with open cards to their employees, wanting them to understand every economical aspect of running the store. Both stores school their employees in economics, urging to transfer the flair and passion the managers have for this practice.

4.4.1 A high-end fashion store

The high-end fashion store is an independent store, owned and ran by two active owners who themself work on the floor as well. Not having the financial support chain offices often provide, the owners and the department managers were extremely focused on having both financial and logistical control. All three interviewees talked a lot of being a merchant, and implementing a merchant mind-set in all their employees. In competition with all the major clothing chains, the store’s survival is fully dependant on doing smart and well though out purchases.

They are constantly seeking opportunities to do great deals and boost both the top and bottom line at the company. Each week is started the same way, with all the full-time employees meeting up in the store before opening:

“Every Monday we have a meeting where we go thru the numbers from last year and the week before this one. What worked, what brands did good, what section of the store has had the most profit?”

Owner – A high-end fashion store

When things are not working as planned, or specific items are not selling they never hesitate change things. The store is carefully designed with a large campaign table at the front, luring the customers inside the store. Monday is not the only day where sales and numbers are analysed. The manager in the female department explains that it is a central part of every single workday. When asked how she starts her day, she answered:

“First I check my mail and stuff like that. Then I prepare a “to-do-list” so that every employee know their assignments for that day, what’s important, what’s less important. Then I go thru all the numbers, look at the numbers, what was sold yesterday, check the budgets, what are our goals? Have we sold the items we want to sell? What should be our focus today compared to yesterday?”

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

At Tuesdays, all the managers meet at the office between seven and eight o’clock in the morning, where they plan, analyse and educate themselves on new items and collections. Obtaining full insight into the financial numbers is one of the main purposes of these meetings. A second central part of these meetings is planning their future activities. Large and important campaigns are planned approximately six months in advance, making sure that they get the merchandise as cheap as possible. The manager in the male department confirms the tremendous focus on campaigns. He tells us that it is not only about pushing the revenue, but being smart and making profit as well:

“During our campaigns we put a lot of attention on our gross profit, not just the revenue. It’s like we’re trying to make money during these periods as well. Then you have to be prepared, be early. It takes a lot of work with the logistics and everything. For instance, sometimes we can buy a batch of items in November on a great deal, just to sell them during “Tønsberg dagene” in June. So if we identify a good deal, we’re quick to grab it”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The second important preparation before a campaign at the high-end fashion store is handling their logistics and inventory. In the biggest campaigns, several thousand items have to be priced, folded and placed. At the same time the store has to look as sharp as any other day. The managers in the male department explains:

“Before campaigns when there is a lot of boxes and incoming merchandise it is of utmost importance to get everything out of the store, into the inventory room as quickly as possible. And we need to have a tidy inventory, I want every item to be folded and ready so that it can be counted and sizes can be located quickly. It’s about the money after all so an untidy inventory is not good enough. Before the campaigns this requires a bit of extra work, but we reap the benefits from it in the long run”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The owner was also emphasizing the importance of handling the inventory well, not only before large campaigns, but every single day:

“It’s extremely important to us that our inventory is tidy and that the logistics of it’s at a 100%. It has to be easy to find the items at any given time. The part-time employee that works every other Saturday has to be able to know and locate where the items are. Details are highly important”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

Another aspect of running a clothing store is that the collections are often purchased six to nine months in advance. Having full control over what you have ordered can be tough enough. Nonetheless, knowing that the things you get delivered are what you originally ordered is even more difficult. The manager in the female department gave us insight in how she keeps control:

“...I know that a received package is wrong because when I order merchandise I write everything down on an order form. In addition, we get an order confirmation from the supplier that I again cross-examine with my own order form. When the merchandise comes in I have a binder with the order confirmation that I cross-examine again and check of with what I have ordered and have has arrived and then I write down the date”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

The high-end fashion store has implemented an innovative inventory system using RFID which the manager of the male department is in charge of.. They are among

the first independent clothing stores in the country embracing this new technology.

“The new RFID system devours a lot of time. The price tag is unique, so if you lose the tag, you cannot just print a new one as we did before. It has been a lot of work. However, it’s a fantastic system when it’s up and running. At the moment we mainly use it for controlling our inventory. However, in the future when the system has been further developed, it will provide us with lots of exciting opportunities”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The high-end fashion store chose to invest in this new inventory system because of their bold decision to try to establish a successful online store. They were hand-picked by their supplier to be one of the pioneers with this new technology.

“I established the system here at the store, so it has been a lot of learning by doing, trying and failing. The supplier of the system has also improved and modernized the system a lot during the last two years. The software is being updated continuously. We were one of the first ones out, which of course is expensive. Everything has not been running smoothly all the time, but isn’t that a part of being a guinea pig?”

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

4.4.2 A fast food restaurant

As a part of a large international chain, the fast food restaurant has major support from the national head-office regarding the financial assignments. Additionally, the husband of the store manager got the remaining financial responsibilities, giving the store manager the opportunity to devote her full attention towards her employees and running the restaurant. However, not by any means suggesting that the financial assignments are disregarded. Naturally, the interviews at the fast food restaurant did not contain a lot of information regarding finances. However, a severe focus on inventory control was discovered:

“We are very strict with reordering and filling up our inventory. The employees are given a pre-filled out list with what they are supposed to pick up from the freezer or storage so that everything is ready and set for the rest of the day and the next morning. For instance, the bread needs to defrost for the day after, the meat needs to rest for x amount of hours. A lot of planning and timing comes into play in these situations”.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

Furthermore, the store manager told that because of her strict methods, the restaurant never runs empty of commodities and goods. This was also mentioned

as a success factor in why her restaurant is performing so well. Directly asked if other restaurants in the same chain run out of commodities, she immediately answered conformingly: “Yes!”. The part-time employee confirmed the strict inventory control:

“Before opening, I find out what we need of commodities and products and then I count them. We have to get enough for the whole day. They are stored in the back”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

4.4.3 A children’s clothing store

At the children clothing store, they start the day with the same practice as at the high-end fashion store, obtaining total control over the numbers and yesterday’s sales:

“Every morning before the store opens, I find out how we are doing compared to the other Norwegian stores. What is our gross profit? What are the best-selling items? You always have some close competitors, how are they doing? I quickly go through the inventory. You don’t want your inventory to be too low. A couple of busy days and you start to lose sales. There are so many stores in our chain in Norway, if one specific item is selling really well, it is out of stock instantly”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

The store manager is not only highly interested in sales and finances herself, she wants to spill over her concern for numbers to the employees as well:

“When I call the store at the evening, at seven, eight or nine o’clock, then I expect the girls to know what today’s budget is. I expect that they know how much today’s revenue is, and how we are performing. The girls have got very concerned by numbers. They update the cash register all the time to find out how they are doing”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

In common with the high-end fashion store and the fast food restaurant, the children’s clothing store has a massive focus on their inventory. Even though they get a lot of financial support from the head office, the finance and logistic is constantly in the spotlight:

“We are very strict on accepting invoices every day and updating them when the new products are arriving. The invoices shall never stay unprocessed for more than 24 hours, as we aim to have total control over the inventory at all times. If we fail in updating the invoices frequently enough, e.g. we can have 10 unprocessed invoices and think that the

inventory is too low, resulting in a wrongly placed order. Then, when you update the invoices, your inventory is 350.000 NOK too high”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

4.4.4 Summary

Our cases display strict financial and logistical supervision to maintain a high level control of store performance and inventory status. Regarding financial control and focus, the high-end fashion store was in its own league. Presumably because they do not have the same assistance and back-up a chain office often provides. Both the high-end fashion store and the children’s clothing store showed a huge passion for sales and numbers, including managers and most of the employees. When it comes to logistics and inventory control, all three of our cases have strict rules and devotes a lot of attention and care towards this matter. The high-end fashion store with their expensive and innovative RFID system, the fast food restaurant with their strict rules and timing regarding restocking, and the children’s clothing store, which have one of the most frequent inventory counts in the industry, is only some of the examples.

We believe the managers passion for numbers and dedication in passing it over to their employees is an important contributor to the stores high performance. In this way, everyone is pulling in the same direction, shaping and creating a culture where people want to deliver astonishing results. At the same time, having total inventory control gives the stores the opportunity to reach their true potential. Turning down a sale because of lackadaisical restocking was characterized as an almost unforgivable error. We do not see any immediate risk by having strict financial and logistical control, it seems more like a must-have to be able to continuously succeed.

4.5 Surveillance & Testing

Surveillance and testing is a practice used to ensure constant outstanding customer service in addition to maintaining a consistently spotless and inspiring store. When the cat is away, the mice dances at the table is a well-known Norwegian saying. In the retail industry, many store managers are struggling with getting part-time workers to behave in their desired way when they are not present themselves.

The practice of surveillance and testing entails almost a paranoid level of supervision and confirmation of knowledge and skill level. This constitutes behaviour such as getting acquaintances to go undercover into the stores to check upon the service level and tidiness of the store, personally monitor the store outside of work, testing their knowledge level on the merchandise and purposely hiding or placing unwanted objects or leaving dust untouched to see if it gets taken care of by the employees.

“If I think our revenue is too low, I can send someone to test the service level, without doubt”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

Surveillance and testing is actively used in all three of our cases to ensure their desired behaviour, skill and product knowledge. Over time and with rising experience, the store managers naturally decrease the level of monitoring and testing to a certain degree. However, they never completely let go of this practice.

“I can put a cloth hanger under a rack, just to see if the one who is opening the day after has removed it. I do small tests like that. My boss does it as well. It may seem a bit rude. However, as they usually pass the tests I think it’s okay”.

Assistant store manager – A children’s clothing store

When having been presented this category, the manager at the fast food restaurant wanted to add that she thinks it is an advantage to sometimes take the customers perspective. It is easy to overlook things after doing the same things every day. She also commented that it is impossible to be at work 24-7 and maintain total control. She believes testing the employees or sending a friend to do so, increases the employee’s knowledge level in addition to raise the focus at the most important issues. The owner at the high-end fashion store believes they are good at executing this category. However, he adds that they do not want to directly monitor their employees. At the same time, he states that the city is quite small and if some employees do not do their work, he usually gets notified. Contrastingly, the manager at the children’s clothing store felt this category hit her spot on. Stating that the employees do not always have to know, and how important the balance of giving responsibilities and testing if it is carried out properly.

4.5.1 A high-end fashion store

At the high-end fashion store the expectations of the employees' product knowledge are enormous. When asked how they can monitor that the knowledge level is at their desired level, the owner explains:

"We test them once in a while. That we do. We are out in the stores all the time, talking to the employees. We use an extreme amount of time on our leadership, if you like. Having a cup of coffee while talking with the part-timer. Doing some smart testing on their knowledge about the merchandise without going thru a formal exam. Take a lap around the store and dig for some information. This helps uncovering a lot of things, both good and bad".

Owner – A high-end fashion store

He emphasizes the amount of time the managers in the company use together with their subordinates. Without exception, the managers have to work evenings sometime during the week, and every other weekend. This practice is not similar to the purer form of surveillance that we witnessed at the fast food restaurant and children's clothing store. However, all the time they spend with the employees give a satisfactory insight into their behaviour, knowledge and skill. When we asked the manager at the male department of the store, he confirmed that they do a lot of testing:

"...Oh yeah, I do that all the time. When I have an employee who works every other week or so, I pay attention to what he knows. I ask him questions like, "what's new here? Do you see any changes? Why do you think we have put the shoes over there, where did the jackets use to be?" You know, it's about asking these kinds of follow-up questions. Thus, making sure he's in on why we are doing the changes we are doing".

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

It is easy to think that testing is a one-sided evil from the employee's perspective. However, the manager at the female department made an interesting comment that we believe is often neglected. She tells us that the tests give employees the opportunity to showcase their skills and knowledge. Explaining that when you have been reading up on different kind of fabrics and their features, it is actually nice to be able to display your knowledge. Furthermore, she explains:

"...Yes, testing is important. Both for us as managers to control and insure that the employees know what they are supposed to and it is a chance for the employees to present their knowledge and skill to us as well. It's important to us that they are given the chance to showcase their knowledge. Let's consider the chance that an employee has been working

hard and cramming about Komono watches, right? But they are never given the chance to show of that work. That would suck for them. So it's a two-way street with the testing, both for us to check upon them and for them to show off to us".

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

4.5.2 A fast food restaurant

At the fast food restaurant, the manager actively use surveillance to check out what is going on after she has left for the day:

"Sometimes I come here during the evenings when I am not working to spy on my employees from across the mall. Or at least look a little".

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

She explained that the restaurant is located in both the first and second floor of the mall. The cashier is on the first floor, and it is easy to stand in an other section of the mall and overlook the cashier. The manager is constantly testing her employees. They have two annual formal tests of the restaurant called REV. A person from the head-office comes and checks out everything, or e.g. temperatures, the product knowledge of the employees, cleanness etc. The store manager has a history of acing these tests. She has made her own miniature version of it that she regularly uses:

"I also have my own tests. Mini-REV I call them. I walk into the kitchen and check the times and stuff like that. I can check if a sauce that was supposed to be thrown away at six o'clock is still there when I come back at eight o'clock".

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

In addition to the unannounced tests, the employees are more formally tested at all the workstations. For the restaurant to be able to constantly have a high level of customer service and burgers that taste exactly the same, tests seems to be heavily used at the fast food restaurant. It is not unimaginable this this practice is an important factor in why they have won so many awards and are looked upon as a top performer by the chain and Steen & Strøm. As a matter of fact, they are not only testing knowledge and service at the fast food restaurant. They test almost everything, also if the employees are reading their e-mails:

"When receiving an e-mail, we have a sheet at work that has to be signed when the content is read and understood. We can also be asked if we have read the e-mails and what they are about".

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

She explained that the control questions can come at any time, and that the method is effective in getting all the employees to read their e-mails. Moreover, the full-time employee tells us that the tests are used as a mean in performing perfection at all time:

“We get followed-up on all the time. Two times a year the head office officially tests us. My boss often says to us: “If we were tested today, this had been a critical mistake. You have to remember this until the next time”. You never know when and who are testing you. Therefore, we have to always do things the right way, every single day”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

It is not only the store manager who performs the tests at the fast food restaurant. The part-time employee that has worked at the restaurant for five years and gained a lot of experience is entrusted by the manager and has engulfed the testing culture:

“I do follow-up and tests. When I see an unusual burger being ordered, I can go back to the kitchen and check if they know how to make that burger”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

4.5.3 A children's clothing store

At the children's clothing store, they are also practicing surveillance. However, as previously shown, the store manager has a slightly different method when investigating what is going on in the store when she is away, sending someone to test the service level. Asked whom she could send, the store manager answered that it could be a friend, family member or an acquaintance. She continues:

“In addition, I do many tests that they are not aware of. I check that invoices are processed and orders are sent. They do not always have to know about it, and if everything is as it should be then they can continue without knowing. However, I do a lot of tests before they get my trust”.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

She explained that when the employees prove that they do what is expected from them, the trust comes together with independence, autonomy and responsibility. Both the assistant store manager and the full-time employee confirmed that they are entrusted with more autonomy the more skilled and experienced they get.

Just as at the fast food restaurant, the use of tests as a mean to make the employees stay on their toes was also identified in the children's clothing store. The store manager says that the expectations of execution of tasks are widely understood. When she has been absent from the store and it has been quiet and few things to do, she can be greeted by a neat and orderly backroom with folded edges and sometimes also a perfectly arranged external storage. Asked if she does any tests, the store manager answered:

“The girls know that I check the hourly sale reports every day, and they know that I can ask what they spent their time doing if the sale has been low. They know the expectations. After a quiet day, I often experience that the back is cleared or the external storage is cleaned and sorted”.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

The store manager enjoys having total control. She goes through everything that has happened since the last time she was at work, acquiring full control and finding out whom to test and in what:

“I always go through the girl's sales as well as reports from the day before. How did they perform? Sometimes, one employee has been unlucky and had many returns. What's the reason for that? Maybe it's cynical, but I'm very concerned of the inventory, and I have had employees stealing before. Therefore, a red light would be flashing if the same employee often has too many returns”.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

4.5.4 Summary

Surveillance and testing are practises the managers use because they are not able to be at work all the time themselves. Surveillance was first and foremost detected at the fast food restaurant and the children's clothing store. However, all three of our cases are continuously test their employees, both to check on the current status and to keep the employees on their toes at all times. This use of testing, as a means to uphold their high standards, is something we believe largely contributes to our cases' success. An imaginable pitfall of these practices is a stressful working climate full of employees who are afraid of making mistakes, in addition to a workplace with a severe lack of trust. However, combining comprehensive training, which will be presented in the next category, with close follow-up, we did not see any signs of a destructive outcome in our cases. In fact, the interviews revealed that testing also can be perceived positively by employees, enabling them

to showcase their skills and knowledge, and being the best possible version of themselves.

4.6 Comprehensive Training & never-ending Learning

The practice of comprehensive and thorough training involves a scrutinizing step-by-step training method where the new employees are monitored, controlled and given basic work assignments before gradually becoming increasingly freer. The employee is only given new task when they are prepared for it and the level of customers in the store are rather low.

“We are trained in effective sales-techniques and more. You never work alone in the beginning. There is always someone by your side, telling you: “Yes, this is good, however, this could have been different, remember it next time””.

The amount of knowledge sharing in these stores differentiates itself from what one could expect how micromanagers normally would behave. Instead of strictly doing assignments by themselves, in their own way. These leaders share their knowledge and know-how freely with their subordinates, encouraging them to try and learn.

When we get a main delivery, we often make videos and post on our intranet, explaining the product features. Especially with rainwear and other types of technical clothing. Then the girls can look at the video at home as many times they want and get familiar with the new knowledge”.

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

There exists a core focus on efficient information flow and they have created systems to maintain this flow of knowledge. The demand of product knowledge is colossal, and there are several practices to ensure this.

“Everything is well prepared, we always aim to receive the customers in the best way possible, to serve them as good as possible. I work a whole lot with my employees with maintaining and gathering knowledge about our merchandise. It’s important to me that they know what that sweater is made of, without looking at the label. Basic knowledge they need to know, try to maintain that professionalism the customers are craving. Know a little about tailoring, know what the fifty-year-old customer wants in a suit as well as what the younger guys want. To have the knowledge that is needed to perform well is very important to us”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The managers strive to achieve development and opportunity that enhances the employee's urge to learn and grow. They focus on the strongest, not only the weakest. The leaders cheer high-performers, instead of getting jealous and afraid of their own position. All of the examined leaders have started at the floor as part-time employees working their way up towards their managerial positions.

"I look up to my boss. She is the one teaching me new stuff. She has won a lot of awards, and is only one year older than me. It is very motivating to see everything that she has achieved.

Assistant store manager – A children's clothing store

When asked to comment on this category as well as the importance and actuality for her restaurant, the manager had nothing else to add besides saying that she totally agree. The owner at the high-end fashion store also acknowledges the importance of this category, further specifying that they have a training manual, where the employees own effort is just as important as their schooling. At the children's clothing store they also have a manual for training of new employees. The manager highlights the importance of every employee having the same high level of knowledge. She also wanted to stress the value of the knowledge sharing they experience among their employees.

4.6.1 A high-end fashion store

As previously mentioned the owners at the high-end fashion store have deeply rooted desire to share their "merchant" knowledge about the industry.

"We teach all the employees how to calculate the gross profit, turnover rates and so on. We want to get them to be interested in the mathematical aspect of the job, the financial numbers behind it all. Therefore, we school them on these things. We show them physically in the store how we are able to lower the turnover rates by changing the layout of our products. Teach them the "grocer gene" as we like to call it".

Owner - A high-end fashion store

The male department manager further elaborates:

"...To motivate us and make us learn everything from turnover rates to gross profit and financial terms like that, that maybe even some managers at our competing stores don't even know about. To make us learn the importance of the financial aspect, the whole business part of it. We want everyone to know about this stuff, from the leader to the guy that works every other Saturday. I believe that this gives the employees and us a unique ownership to the merchandise and the financial numbers. This is

something we are really working hard with to achieve”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

However, this sharing of knowledge does not come without a cost. One must possess the drive and desire to learn individually to truly grow and be given more responsibility at the high-end fashion store. One of the owners tells us:

“We have small crash courses about the items when they are delivered. We can’t teach them everything so our demands for them teaching on their own is quite high. It has a lot to do with their own interest as well. How badly do they want to learn?It’s a mixture of us training them and them controlling their own development, to have the curiosity to harvest that knowledge themselves. We quickly, from the moment they are hired, give them the opportunity to get on the floor and work with the customers. Then we coach them during this process. Take them in and coach them on issues they are struggling with”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

Their training is very comprehensive. Not only because they want them to learn everything there is about the store and the industry itself, because they want their employees to feel safe when they are by themselves.

“It’s very important to me that they feel safe with the assignments they are given, or else they won’t do it properly either”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

The customer base is spoiled with a high level of service and expertise when they are shopping at the high-end fashion store. No less is expected if they were to shop from a part-time employee. The female department managers further clarifies:

“My training is very thorough, concerning both the merchandise that is in the store when they start and the knowledge behind the brand is of utmost importance. To know where the brand is from, what the different brands are known for and what they mean to us. There can be brands that produce more or less everything, but for us they only provide us with shoes, right? Why is that? Because that’s where we think they are at their best. We want them to know everything about what’s in the store, behind the brands and why we have chosen them”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

All of this knowledge sharing is not only done thru training or early in their career at the store. They constantly try to share knowledge and news about the company. Not only with the upper-management, but all the way down to the part-timer

working every other Saturday. The managers mentioned this during our interview that hierarchy is not important in the company.

“Knowledge is being shared through meeting and stuff like that, of course. But a lot is done in the store on a day-to-day basis as well. I’m active with delegating responsibility to those I work with. So that they also can gain a lot of knowledge. Let’s say that one guy gets the responsibility for a specific brand. Brand knowledge, re-ordering and so forth. I want them to evolve and possess some ownership to the work they do”.

Male department manager – A high-end fashion store

The opportunity to evolve and gain responsibilities in the high-end fashion store is always present. Which as previously mentioned, the two owners are prime examples of. This helps motivate the employees, seeing greener pastures in the horizon. This gives meaning to their work, knowing that if they work hard and do their work with an extra effort they could become owners one day themselves. As one of the owners tells us:

“...That’s how it is at (store name), it’s okay to be a little rough around the edges. It’s okay to take ownership and responsibility of things. It’s not given that you will be given responsibilities, you have to take it. (Other owner) and me are prime examples of that. We took responsibility and now we own the company. (Male department manager) for example, has done it with the RFID and the inventory, which he is amazing at”.

Owner – A high-end fashion store

The female department is a principal candidate for portraying the possibilities that are presented for anyone daring to strive for them at the high-end fashion store. Having chosen the wrong educational path, the department manager dropped out of school and pursued a career within the retail industry. Being previously employed part-time in different stores during her studies and adolescence she aimed for the heavens and defined her goals:

“I told myself, “you know what? I’m going to become a store manager. It may have sounded strange coming from a person working once a week. However, I wasn’t afraid to let the others know about it, and I worked my way up to assistant manager, deputy manager and finally store manager”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

4.6.2 A fast food restaurant

The training at the fast food restaurant is perhaps the most strict and thorough program that we witnessed during our research. Given that every single burger has

to be identical at any given time of day, the austerity is grandiose. The precision comes down to the thickness of the ketchup circles with the manager hanging around the trainees neck observing their every move. She is quick to tell them if they have made a mistake and does not shy away from showing them herself how it should be done. In the managers own words:

“I always tell my new employees that it is better for them to question what they are supposed to do rather than doing it the wrong way. These things always take time, but I believe that the best way of learning is by doing. Most 15-16 year olds want to do everything themselves. So in the beginning I stand and watch over their shoulder and say, “hey, what are you doing now? You can’t do it like that. Put on more, put on less”. I think it’s important. It makes the employees feel safer. The clear guidelines and what they are supposed to do at what time. Those who don’t want to do it like that are more than welcome to go find something else to do”.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

This obsessive attitude towards perfection and scrutiny has been passed over to others in the company. Every employee is supposed to be trained thoroughly enough to be able to do the training of others by themselves:

“When new employees start, everyone is supposed to follow up closely. If the person under training does anything wrong, my boss often say: “Now, someone has learned you the wrong way! Does someone want to take the blame?” Not in a harsh way, however, she’ll let us know. We have a very good learning environment. I’m not afraid of making mistakes”.

Full-time employee – A fast food store

When asked what she thinks about the manager’s close attention to her employees and her detail oriented behaviour, the part-time employee did not only tell us that she believe it is important, she has also adopted it herself:

“Training and follow-up is a key to success. If the employees are not trained well enough, they don’t know what to do. Then it’s safe to stay behind the cashier, and the restaurant will end up looking like shit. If you’re not sufficiently trained in the kitchen, in the front, or in the restaurant, in busy times, you will end up looking at the order screen. The result is angry waiting customers”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The burger has to be exact the same every time it’s made. With two circles of ketchup, three circles of ketchup and so on. We have a list with the weight on the burgers, number of tomato slices, cucumber etc. During training, I stand by their side. First, I show them how it’s done. Three circles of ketchup, one circle of mustard and so on. How they wrap the burger in paper. They can stand and practice on how to wrap a burger in

paper as fast as they can for a long time. They need to learn how to do it. And it has to be done nicely as well. Finally, when they manage the process they can work in the kitchen and make the burgers by themselves”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

However, this strict regime of surveillance and control is adored. The employees seem to understand the necessity of the intensive training and they appreciate being given more responsibility as time moves on. Furthermore, they understand the how the team have to operate, placing the people where they are most likely to succeed during stressful periods. In quieter times, the employees are placed in new positions being given the opportunity to learn and develop.

“As shift manager, I’m responsible for having the people at the station where they perform the best. However, when it’s not too busy, we rotate more. For instance, if someone is not as good at the cashier, they get to try. When it’s busy, people do what they are best at, making the restaurant go as fast as possible”.

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

Even though the work at the fast food restaurant primarily consists of standardized tasks and techniques, the willingness to learn never ends. When employees show mastery, they get more autonomy and are ready to acquire new skills.

“The restaurant would have probably not had experienced the same amount of success if the boss was not that strict on certain areas, or actually all areas. We learn something new at work every day. In some sense, we are under training all the time. You always learn something new. I feel better at my job for every day passing by. You get freedom at work only when you have proven that you master your tasks. In the beginning, I was never alone. However, now, she can say: “(Name), now you can do that by yourself, you can run the kitchen on your own”. I like this way of earning your independency. Then you also get recognition when things get done well”.

Full-time employee – A fast food store

As in the high-end fashion store, the employees are given every opportunity to grow within the company. By having done so herself, the manager clearly sees the benefits of motivation and opportunity. Both of the employees told us about their opportunities within the restaurant, in addition to explaining how the manager is cheering and pushing them to take new steps.

4.6.3 A children's clothing store

Training is undeniably important for the manager in the children's clothing store as well. Observing the new employees completing sales and intervening if necessary, she coaches them after the sale letting them know what they did correctly and not. One clever thing we noticed is that she sends her new employees out to other stores to observe their service level so that they can experience the feeling of being customers themselves. She even makes video about the products so that the employees can bring it home to learn on their spare time.

"I stay close to new employees and observe their interactions with costumers. If needed, I join the conversation, however, trying to not take entirely over the sale. I want to let the girls try and evaluate the conversation after the customer has left. Although, sometimes I have to intervene. I don't want to be a boss the girls don't want to work with."

Store manager - A children's clothing store

"As a part of their training, I send new employees out to test the customer service in other stores. I want them to make up an opinion on what is good service, and what's not".

Store manager - A children's clothing store

The full-time employee told us that she has been comprehensively trained in all the routines and practices at the store. From how to clean and build walls, to how to give feedback to her colleagues. In fact, the store manager tries to be so thorough when training new leaders that they can do the training of new employees themselves:

"When I'm training leaders, I'm so tough with them, that when they start the training with a part-time employee, they are able to give them the same training as I would have done".

Store manager

No differently from the other stores, the employees at the children's clothing store are given more responsibility when they are ripe for it:

"On quiet days, we let people try out things they're not mastering yet. For instance, we have a new employee now that needs to practice her merchandising skills. We let her do that when it's not too busy".

Assistant store manager - A children's clothing store

The manager emphasizes the importance of knowledge sharing by constantly updating their intranet and letting the employees know about any new merchandise, which one is the best sellers and if any products have defects or

lacks and so forth. At the children's clothing store they upload pictures of new wall and table displays. The manager wants her employees to be able to wow their customers with their knowledge. Giving them an experience they would not receive anywhere else. However, the product knowledge is important in minimizing the number of warranty claims as well, by enlightening the customers about not using waterproofing spray or softer for instance.

We want to "Wow" the customers with our product knowledge. The girls need the basic knowledge and confidence to show of our deep insights. They should know what a water resistance level of 2000, 3000 and 5000 is. And things like that".

Store manager - A children's clothing store

The mentality of knowledge sharing has been spread to the other employees as well. The full-time employee told us that the girls inform each other of the condition of the store when it is not left perfectly in order. She said that it is much easier to start off the day by cleaning others mess when you are informed of it beforehand.

"If I have had many customers before closing and the store is a bit messy, I always send a text message and let the one who is opening the day after, know that the store is not as tidy as usual. However, normally, the store is in perfect condition when closed".

Full-time employee - A children's clothing store

The store manager shows evidence of being great at personalizing the training and learning to according to the needs of the employee. Her girls claim the she is fantastic at always fining new techniques to satisfy the customers. Something she explains as a result of loving to get recognitions for good service by the customers.

"My boss is very good at coaching me. We communicate well. In addition to being colleagues, we also have become friends. I have ADHD and problems concentrating in some situations. She knows this and facilitates very well. For instance, if she is going away for a week, she writes down a detailed plan for the whole week, because she knows that I easily forget verbal notes. She is highly skilled. She is good at both giving positive feedback and constructive critique. If something is not as it should be, she'll surly let you know".

Assistant store manager - A children's clothing store

The learning never seems to end at the children's clothing store. The assistant store manager told us that they recently had a course in merchandising. The store

manager further explained that there are five annual collections. When a new collection has arrived, they always conduct a staff meeting ensuring that the knowledge about the new products is in order. These meetings make the girls feel confident about their jobs. They seize every opportunity to learn something new:

“We do a lot of coaching. I always learn things from my boss, which I again try to pass further down the line. Merchandising, for instance, is something we spend a lot of time on. We grab every opportunity we get to build a wall-display together with the girls, so that they can learn how to do it”.

Assistant store manager

4.6.4 Summary

Comprehensive training is a vital practice in all of our three cases, making new employees quickly fit and adapt into their high performing environment. Both at the fast food restaurant and at the children’s clothing store, the interviews revealed managers standing over the shoulders and neck-and-neck with new employees, monitoring, directing and guiding them. The descriptions from the kitchen at the fast food restaurant truly display the nit-picking behaviour micromanagers traditionally are known for. The danger of being overly detailed and painstaking is of course present. However, in the words of the manager at the fast food restaurant, they are welcome to find another place to work if they do not like it. The thorough training looks to us as a fundamental part of ensuring present and future success. In addition, all our three cases emphasized that the employees feel safer in doing their jobs, when they have been comprehensively trained at serving customers and gaining product knowledge. Indeed, it seems evident that the comprehensive training makes the employees feel and perform better at their jobs.

The demand for product knowledge is enormous in all three of our cases. As a result of the multifariousness of their products, especially at the high-end fashion store and children’s clothing store, knowledge and information sharing are key activities when they aim to give every customer the same great customer experience. There was identified multiple methods for sharing knowledge and information in all three stores. We find the contrast to the fast food restaurant is logical considering their modest variation in products and their pledge of standardization.

The training and learning never ends. The managers truly want their employees to grow, evolve and take responsibility by constantly pushing them forward. We find this eagerness to learn and develop as a natural cause to our three cases on-going success. Evident in all three cases, new techniques and knowledge are acquired when new products are introduced. However, this is especially striking at the high-end fashion store and the children's clothing store. The never-ending willingness to learn seems to generate workplaces where the employees grow and climb the career ladder. From our interviews, it was obvious that these three stores had a low turnover rate and employees who enjoyed their jobs with employees often staying for several years.

4.7 Social Modelling & Caregiving

The category called "Social Modelling and Caregiving" are several practices that incorporates a celestial drive to ensure a safe and prosperous work atmosphere for all the employees. This conduct includes ensuring that their employees get the medical attention they desperately need, never leaving or coming to work without handing out hugs to all the employees, addressing your employees as family, allowing mistakes (if the effort was good), motivating the employees. Thus, making the job a sanctuary where one call lay all of ones troubles to rest.

"... If I had to think of something I would believe our success is due to my focus on the employees and creating a great work environment, a safe work environment.

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

The managers at both the fast food restaurant and the children's clothing store are prime examples of a caregiver:

"She sees me both as a person and an employee. I can always call her if I have any questions, also when I'm home. She truly cares for me. I understood right away that this is a place where things are as they should be. I have really enjoyed my first year working here"

Full-time employee – A children's clothing store

Furthermore, leading by example is a mentality the investigated leaders possess and a practice that portrays them as role models for their employees. With their high standards and strong work ethic, the though demands that they require of their employees do not seem neither unfair nor too high. Their subordinates look

up to them and aspire to be like them. The managers are often the first to come to work and the last to leave, never shying away from a challenge. No task is beneath them and often they can be found working on the floor with customers or personally cleaning the store.

“My boss is as perfect role-model. She is good at showing: “If you look at how I’m doing it now or if you do this, then it will go way faster”. I often think that her recommendations are clever and I try to remember them. If I do remember, she says: “Oh, that was smart, now you know it”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

This category was later shown to the manager at the fast food restaurant who recognised its great importance and said that she could not have outlined it better herself. Likewise, both the owner at the high-end fashion store and the manager at the children’s clothing store confirmed the relevance and value of this category. The owner at the high-end fashion store stated that they live through “*The (Store name) Family*”, a term he truly believes the employees are proud using.

4.7.1 A high-end fashion store

Unity and a high sense of camaraderie is not only something that the managers yearn to prosper, it is engraved in their very culture and part of the company values. “Family” is what they call each other. The owners are known as “Dad and Dad”. They strongly believe in providing a safe impervious work environment where the employees are given the opportunity to flourish if they desire to achieve greatness.

“First and foremost I think we have a great unity in our company. We are the (store name) “family” as you may or may not have heard of. It’s not a picture we try to expose to externally to our customers, but it’s something that we really are. (Owner) and (owner) are “Dad” and “Dad”. We feel like a family and we hang out socially after work. (Owner) and (owner) see and listen to everybody, from the part-timers to the store managers. Every one can be a part of the decision-making if they so desire. If you want to go places in (store name), there is no one stopping you”.

Female department manager – A high-end fashion store

Similarly to the rest of their employees the owners of the high-end fashion store partake in the everyday assignments and procedures in their store. Ranging from working the late shifts to cleaning and maintenance around the store. Having both

started as part-timers the owners value and acknowledge the importance of routines, maintenance and getting their hands dirty when necessary.

“Due to having small children in kindergarten I’m not the first person on the job, however normally I stay in until approximately nine’o clock in the evening.”

Owner – A high-end fashion store

4.7.2 A fast food restaurant

Given that the fast food restaurant is a franchise store it is considerably more strenuous to differentiate oneself from the competitors due to the strict ruling and guidelines from the head-office. One way they believe they differ from the numerous other fast food restaurants is their level of enjoyment at work and the constant focus on social well-being and hard work. The store manager has pushed the boundaries on what is expected of a supervisor when it comes to taking care of the subordinates.

“My husband has told me that I get too involved with my employees sometimes. I like being open and letting people get close to me. We had one employee who struggled with an eating disorder for a year and a half. I brought her into the back office and asked her if everything was alright. I was crying. I drove her to the psychiatrist and waited outside for over an hour. Her parents didn’t do anything about it. So there were times when I should have been to work, but I took her to the psychiatrist instead because I don’t think she would have gone alone. I’m really touched by people and I always try to put that extra effort into making them feel good. I care a lot about people.”

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

This demeanour shows a lot of character and is highly contagious spreading quickly onwards to not only the employees, but the customers as well. This infectious mind-set is not merely connected to enhancing a secure and delightful work environment.

“We have a great working environment. There is always a good mood at work. And people notice it, it’s passed over to the customers. We talk to the customers about everything and nothing, we have a very welcoming attitude at work.”

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

With hard work, dedication and showing that neither any amount nor kind of work is beneath her, the manager is able to motivate and inspire her employees. In

addition to arriving at work around six every morning, four hours before the restaurant opens, she can manage every workstation. Moreover, she states in her interview that she really enjoys to work at the register, talking to the customers, asking about their day and so on.

“I would say that my biggest critique is myself. I have had bosses that never work on the lines in the kitchen. I think that is a bad thing. As an employee I want my manager to take part in the work.”

Store manager – A fast food restaurant

This mentality towards her job has made the employees admire her, gazing upon her as the perfect role model. Praising her ways of conducting work, even when that method consists of hanging around their shoulders physically showing and telling them what to do. Perhaps, something that the average employee normally would despise.

“My boss is the reason why I have worked here for so long. We have so much fun at work. We laugh and enjoy ourselves. Of course, we have to clean and go through the to-do-list, however, we do it while we are having a good time. She has become more of a friend than a boss. We eat lunch outside of work on occasion. It’s nice. She is very good at creating a positive work environment.”

Part-time employee – A fast food restaurant

The full-time employee totally agrees with her colleague:

“My boss is as perfect role-model. She is good at showing: “If you look at how I’m doing it now or if you do this, then it will go way faster”. I often think that her recommendations are clever and I try to remember them. If I do remember, she says: “Oh, that was smart, now you know it”.

Full-time employee – A fast food restaurant

During these interviews we witnessed perhaps the highest level of control and supervision of any of the interviewed managers. However, the employees adore their manager. When given the chance to present to us what they would have done differently if they were managers, everyone answered “nothing”.

4.7.3 A children’s clothing store

Being responsible for seventeen employees, all female, some full-time and some part-time employees a whole lot of effort and focus is placed on social modelling by the manager of the children clothing store. With the store being located in one of the busiest malls in downtown Oslo with customers constantly coming and

going the amount of stress and pressure could break down even the most experienced retail worker. The brilliant solution the manager has implemented to break the tension is to physically acknowledge every worker every single time they come or leave work. This is something all the employees have been ecstatic about during over interviews. They look forward going to work and sometimes refusing to leave.

“We have a very good work environment, even though we are 17 girls working together. We give each other hugs when arriving and leaving work. At first, new employees think it is weird to hug each other every day. Sometimes even a bit disgusting. Anyhow, they get used to it. When a person is finished for the day and gives a hug to the other employees, even the customers notice. When I left the store for this interview, I gave two hugs. One of the customers said: “Wow, what a fantastic atmosphere you guys have at work”. There are not many others stores where the employees are hugging each other”

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

The manager told us that two of the girls that previously have worked in other large companies feel very comfortable at the children’s clothing store in contrast to their last employer. Because they feel safe, they are looking forward to going to work. The store manager further elaborated:

“If there are any struggles at home, illness or other challenges, then the workplace should be a sanctuary where you feel safe. You spend most of your life at work. If you don’t enjoy your work, you should find something else to do. I have worked in this company for 6 years now, and after a twelve or thirteen hours long workday, I still want to go to work the day after.”

Store manager – A children’s clothing store

The assistant store manager confirms the positive work environment and talks very highly about her boss. She told us that all the girls like and respect the manager. Moreover, the manager never lets a bad day influence her mood. She is always smiling and according to her employees you can talk to her about everything.

“I think a lot of our stores success can be attributed to the positive atmosphere at work. I really enjoy working here and we have a lot of fun together. I also believe my boss is a huge part of our good results. She can be perceived as strict. However, she is always fair and we really enjoy each other’s company. I think that is why our team is so good. We support each other and we motivate each other. The best days are those my boss and I work together, then we are invincible”.

Assistant store manager – A children's clothing store

Besides ensuring physical safety and comfort for her employees the manager is well aware of the importance of acknowledging the effort her employees put in their day-to-day activities. Never shying away from letting the employees know that their effort is appreciated. Even when an employee is not a work but facing any strenuous task in their life e.g. an exam at school. This has led to the employees taking responsibility themselves and increasing the will to succeed, leaving the amount of sick leave close to zero.

“I have a good dialogue with the girls. We talk a lot with each other. When I open the store in perfect condition, it only costs me 30 seconds to send a text message telling that it was nice to open a clean and neat store. If a student sits at school and struggles with an exam while getting that message, it can make her day. In addition, it probably makes her wanting to leave the store in the same condition the next time she closes. During my six years as a store manager I have only got two sick leaves. Our absence because of illness is close to zero. It has to be a result of people enjoying their work. It has to be the main reason.”

Store manager – A children's clothing store

The manager in the children's clothing store is no different than her examined peers when it comes to being a role model for her employees and getting her hands dirty everyday. Spending hours preparing the store before opening hours and always aiming for that extra sale showing her employees how to properly handle the role as a salesman.

“You have to be a role model. You have to try getting additional sales on every customer. If you think that the customer is pleased with only one item and let them leave the store. Why should my girls try to sell extra items then, when the store manager fails in trying? Originally, my workday starts at 9.00. However, I come to work 7.00 every day. That is something I have chosen by myself. The head office has told me many times that I don't have to be at work before 9.00. Nonetheless, I'm a person who likes to start the day at 7.00, filling up the shelves and getting ready for a new day.

Store manager – A children's clothing store

Moreover, the manager strongly believes that if she does not show her employees that she is willing to go that extra distance and sacrifices her spare-time, why would the employees do it?

I don't want to show my weak side when at work. If I have a difficult customer or are in a hurry, I always have to make time. Yes, I might miss

my train. Because, I don't want to show the girls that it is acceptable to interrupt in a middle of a sale. You have to show that it is okay to miss a train. If the customer is experiencing great service, then I can't interrupt the sale and let one of the other girls take over. The customer would probably leave more money in our store if I close the sale myself."

Store manager – A children's clothing store

There is no doubt that the employees' like their manager. Both the assistant store manager and the full-time employee talked a lot about how much they respected her. Equivalently to the previous stores the employees admire and aspire to be like their manager.

"...She runs the best store in the whole chain, worldwide. Of course, I want to be as good as she is. I really do".

Full-time employee – A children's clothing store

"I look up to my boss. She is the one teaching me new stuff. She has won a lot of awards, and is only one year older than me. It is very motivating to see everything that she has achieved.

Assistant store manager – A children's clothing store

The popularity of the store manager was confirmed numerous times by her employees, hoping that she never leaves for another job. The full-time employee said the managers' passion for her job shines through her and is being passed on to others. At work, the full-time employee always want to perform her best, hoping that the same passion will be transferred on to her subordinates.

"I hope she never quits her job. It would turn my everyday upside down. She makes me want to succeed at work. I don't know how she's doing it. However, she often praises good effort. She is good at teaching me new stuff. She has full control, something I also want to have. I want to walk in her shoes."

Full-time employee – A children's clothing store

4.7.4 Summary

All the investigated managers truly care for their employees, wanting them to enjoy their work, grow both personally and professionally while grasping responsibility. The manager at the fast food restaurant is practically treating her employees like if they were her own children. Her husband has to remind her to not engage too deeply in the employee's personal life. However, the manager struggles to comply with his recommendations. The interviews in the children's clothing store unveiled that it is not only the manager who care for her employees, the employees deeply like and respect her as well. Both the female store managers

commit hundred percent in creating and maintaining a safe and positive work environment. We did not detect the same motherly devotion at the high-end fashion store. However, it was evident that they also have a great work environment, with the two owners being called father and father by their employees and the entire sales team view themselves as the “(store name) family.”

We identified a lot of empirical evidence showing how all the managers are great role models to their employees. They are hard working, highly skilled and their love for their jobs shine right through them. The employees look up to their managers, and more than one told us that they want to be like their manager, which we believe is one of the best compliments a manager can receive. We can think of no immediate danger in the way our cases carry out social modelling and caregiving. An imaginable challenge could perhaps be how to perform tough leadership and make arduous decisions when the managers and the employees look upon each other as friends. However, this research has rejected that potential threat in the three investigated cases, without disproving that others can experience this problem.

We believe the category of social modelling and caregiving consists of the most central practices in enabling our cases’ massive success. By making the employees feel safe and appreciated, this category emerges as a contingency in carrying out successful micromanagement. The manager’s high demand, direct feedback and nit-picking behaviour is probably easier to digest with their caregiving attitude and exemplar behaviour.

Part V: Discussion

5.1 Linking back to theory

As presented above, we have identified six different categories containing of several coherent practices, all of them backed up by empirical evidence. Our three cases are all high performers chosen with assistance from Steen & Strøm. In a highly competitive industry all of them have delivered outstanding results over long periods of time. With the exception of the sixth and final category, “social modelling and caregiving”, all the categories consists of micro-managerial practices commonly described as destructive behaviour and dark side personality traits in the leadership literature (Chambers 2004, 14; Knight 2015; White 2010; Wright 2000; Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser 2010; Amabile et al. 2004; Sidhu 2012).

Equivalently to Holtz and Harold (2013, 509) we believe that there is a need for a certain level of balance when it comes to structure and micromanagement. They state there is a curvilinear relationship between structure and counterproductive work behaviour. Similarly, Raveendhran and Wakslak (2014), state that dominative and constant micro-managerial behaviour makes the manager show a lack of leadership skill. Both implying that too little or too much of one thing leads to counter-productiveness. This is where we believe that our managers excel. They are excellent at knowing when and where to micromanage and when and where to behave in a caring and supportive manner. This corresponds to what Bouchard (2009) calls a “Reactive Micromanager”, a leader whom enforces micromanagement when it is deemed necessary. Furthermore, it parallels what Amabile defines as effective leadership (2004, 27). She states that effective leadership requires skill not only in managing both subordinate tasks and subordinate relationships, but also in integrating the two simultaneously. This supports our previous claim concerning the importance of harmonizing your leadership behavior.

These managers constantly use leadership techniques equivalent to micromanagement while being among the utmost successful in the country and in one instance the entire continent. How could this possibly be the case if their behaviour is full of theoretical red flags commonly known as malpractices? This

thesis champion that micromanagement is no sickness or guarantee of derailment. On the contrary, we state that it is a managerial tool that can be highly effective when used properly in a fitting climate. In the following section, we will discuss our cases use of micromanagement and the impact of this leadership behaviour.

According to the reviewed literature on micromanagement, being highly detail oriented, keeping close attention to the employees and how they perform their work are some of the main characteristics of its very existence (Knight 2015; White 2010; Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Sidhu 2012; Raveendhran and Wakslak 2014). Planning work down to the smallest detail is one of the more extreme aspects of micromanagement (Sidhu 2012), a practice we have witnessed numerous times in our three cases. Moreover, the managers in the examined stores put a profuse amount of focus on surveillance and testing. Consequently showing us several traits of micromanagement by portraying an innate need of supervision, tracking time of employees, close scrutiny, control and second-guessing their employees by testing them (Wright 2000, 362; White 2010; Sidhu 2012). We believe it is safe to claim that the managers in our cases can be characterized as micromanagers.

White (2010, 72) states that it is possible to be a good manager while exercising a certain degree of micromanagement. However, he is highly sceptical towards the concept. According to Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser (2010, 566), after receiving the label micromanager, the road to derailment is short. Wright (2000) accuse micromanagers to over-focus at the mean rather than aiming their attention towards the results. After having investigated our three cases, we experienced the opposite. We observed that the manager's close attention towards their employees and their scrutinizing obsession with details was deliberately being used to enhance the results.

Instead of crashing and burning, the leaders in our cases are performing at the top of their class, year after year. Similarly to the managers in the successful 10X companies (Collins and Hansen 2011), these managers are obsessed with details and show a certain degree of paranoia when it comes to their businesses. Collins and Hansen (2011) found three common denominators within the 10X companies, fanatic discipline, empirical creativity and productive paranoia. All three of them

resemble several of the practices we identified in our cases. The manager at the fast food restaurant and children's clothing store show fanatic discipline when arriving hours before opening in order to make their store ready for the day. Moreover, the manager at the fast food restaurant displays fanatic discipline when they never run out of commodities. Also, the high-end fashion store showcases a fanatic discipline by having meetings every Monday and Tuesday and planning activities and campaigns months in advance. Furthermore, all our three cases practice fanatic discipline when maintaining total control of their inventory.

Empirical creativity lets the 10X companies succeed when making bold and creative moves (Collins and Hansen 2011). All three of our cases plan their activities and campaigns on historical numbers and experiences. The manager at the children's clothing store was called crazy by her superior and peers when she ordered six boxes of shirts right after the 17th of May. However, she showed empirical creativity by planning for Eid, a celebration the industry traditionally does not take into account. Another example is her active use of Oslo Spectrum's calendar when planning the timesheets. All three cases display empirical creativity when basing their purchase decisions and supplementary orders on an always up-to-date inventory combined with historical numbers. Displaying a contrast to many actors in the industry that has been known for mainly using their "gut" feeling.

The third common denominator within the 10X companies is productive paranoia, the managers have an innate need keeping their companies constantly on toe (Collins and Hansen 2011). Even though the means is not exactly the same, all our cases use testing to keep their employees sharp. This practice displays paranoia and facilitates productivity. The high-end fashion store shows productive paranoia when using all the quiet periods of the year to plan and prepare for the next peak. Moreover, all our three cases demonstrate productive paranoia through their practices of meticulous planning, execution and follow-up.

As presented in the discussing above, the disciplined leadership described by Collins and Hanson (2011) in the 10X companies is closely linked to the micro-managerial behaviour in our three case. Another leadership behaviour with clear similarities to our cases is what Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008, 667) call

instructional leadership. In their research, schools that performed above average were more likely to be involved in planning, follow-up and reviewing of the students work (2008, 667). These practices are strikingly akin to the category of meticulous planning, execution and follow-up, all key practices in our cases. It is tempting to compare the relationships between principal, teachers and students in instructional leadership to the relationship between store managers, employees and the customers in our cases. To display effective instructional leadership the principals must be proficient about their jobs, knowing how to utilize this competence and to combine these two aforementioned skills in building relational trust (2008, 667).

All the managers in our cases have proved to be highly knowledgeable and skilled in running their businesses. Their results point towards the fact that they also know how to utilize this knowledge. The manager at the children's clothing store for instance has been handpicked to travel around to other stores sharing her valuable knowledge and practices. However, she has also turned down the offer to do this full-time at several occasions as a result of enjoying her present job too much. Through the practices of social modelling and caregiving, the managers in our cases additionally display that they are able to create relational trust. Thus, we can see that the managers in our cases and their micro-managerial practices are closely related to what Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe define as effective instructional leadership (2008, 667).

In their research, Blase and Blase (1999) found that talking to teachers to promote reflection, in addition to facilitating personal growth was the two most important factors in enhancing effective instructional leadership. Both these practices are evident in our cases. The close follow-up and instant feedback are practices implemented to create a better understanding of the work. Hopefully, leading to reflection and both personal and professional growth. Promoting personal growth is also enhanced in our cases through the practises of comprehensive training and never-ending learning, where the managers cheer and push their employees to become the best possible version of themselves.

For a leader to be able to manage their subordinates, she or he has to bear a particular level of insight on the employees' skill level. This would be impossible

without a certain level of supervision (Liao and Chun 2015, 4). Through the practices of surveillance and testing our examined leaders constantly obtain information about their employees and their behaviour at work, enabling facilitation of development and learning. It is viable to claim that without this level of surveillance and testing it is also arduous for the employees to showcase their skillsets, as portrayed by the female department manager at the high-end fashion store. Furthermore, this strict regime of surveillance and testing has helped the employees to stay sharp and to always perform at their best. On the other hand, surveillance and testing can undermine the trust employees' feel they deserve. In our cases, the managers treat this potential pitfall by among other things focusing on knowledge and information sharing, delegating responsibilities and two-way feedback, practices Dutton states create trust (2003b).

What the literature calls interactional monitoring is closely related to the practice of meticulous follow-up. Interactional monitoring, like meticulous follow-up, contains of gathering employees' opinion, feedback and expectation about their work environment. Acting in such a manner could further assist collaboration and transparency between management and their subordinates on what is currently working and what needs alteration (Liao and Chun 2015). This is evidently the situation in our cases, where many of the employees not only have picked up the practices from their managers, however their mind-set on several important matters as well.

As apparent in the Amabile et al. article, there was two micromanagers where one was complained and the other cherished for his work (2004). Both of them had numerous micro-managerial traits in their way of conducting their work. Including and not limited to monitoring progress and regularly providing guidance to their subordinates. However, as previously stated, the skills of the successful manager allowed him to do so in a much more relationship-enhancing fashion (Amabile et al. 2004, 27). As evident in our examined cases, we believe that the successful manager was applauded because of his ability to combine micromanagement with an immense focus on social interactions. He reacted to problems with willingness to help and he praised good work both in private and in public (Amabile et al. 2004, 17-20). Similar to our managers who never lets a chance of appraisal get away from them. Whether it is by a short text message, letting them know in a

meeting or instantly physically acknowledging their achievements they never shy away from potential caregiving and social modelling. We claim that this is one of many reasons why the examined managers gets away with micromanagement and continuously are being successful. Or as Amabile et al. puts it, “effective leadership requires skill not only in managing both subordinate tasks and subordinate relationships, but also in integrating the two simultaneously” (2004, 27).

Just as Mike Faith, the CEO and founder of Headsets.com states in Knights article (2015); our cases demonstrate through the practice of thorough training that micromanagement can be used favourably in training. Initially, the employees are in a tight grip with the managers closely monitoring their every move. Eventually, during quieter days, employees are given the chance to try assignments they do not excel in. Finally, when the employees are deemed ready to act on their own they are given every opportunity to do so. Throughout the training, our managers act explicit with their expectations to employees, similar to what Mike Faith recommends (2015). Further, Holtz and Harold emphasize that by establishing clear roles, assignments and goals companies can reduce sloppiness, carelessness, negligence and other lackadaisical work behaviours (2013, 494-497), all practices that we identified in our cases.

Rebecca Knight states that by micromanaging a team one can reduce the teams’ moral, create mistrust and limit the team’s capability to grow (2015). However, in our cases the managers use micromanagement to achieve the exact opposite. The amount of effort and focus these managers put on training, details, testing and so forth they answer with at least the same amount of focus on social modelling and caregiving, resembling what theory labels high quality connections (Dutton and Heaphy 2003; Stephens, Heaphy and Dutton 2011; Dutton 2003a; Carmeli, Dutton and Hardin 2015; Turner, Dutton and Ragins 2008; Dutton 2003b). These practices include physically acknowledging everyone at work as more than just employees, immersing in respectful engagement, conveying presence and being perceived as genuine. In all of our cases the employees and managers view themselves as friends or “family”. Thus, as previously stated making the job a sanctuary where one can lay all of ones troubles to rest.

We believe that without Social Modelling and Caregiving, the behaviour of the examined managers could be portrayed as destructive in a long-term perspective. Possibly wearing out the employees and resulting in increasing turnover. This description fits the classical view of micromanagement, a view we try to challenge in this thesis. We believe that micromanagers who derails often fail in establishing high-quality connections and are depraving the employee's energy through corrosive connections (Dutton 2003b, 8-10). However, with an immense focus on the individual behind the employee, the managers in our investigated cases have successfully created an environment where they can set and stipulate their high demands without being portrayed as controlling and overpowering. Behaviour that is creating high-quality connections and boosting the employee's positive energy. These positive interactions are not only contagious among the employees, they also rubs on to the customers and other external parties. This renewable energy helps make the teams and stores extraordinary (Dutton 2003b, 11-15).

In the discussion above, one can clearly see the similarities between the micromanagers in our cases and several positive leadership behaviours in the literature, backing up our claim that micromanagement can be conducted prosperously. We believe there are many successful managers "out there" practicing micromanagement, who are wrongfully not being placed under that label. Further, we suspect a lot of the critique towards micromanagement often is due to an overuse of its practices. An all-in or nothing mentality. In our cases, we have seen that these successful micromanagers also provide responsibilities, freedom and a lot of care. These managers loosen their tight grip when the environment or task is suitable, tightening it up again when necessary. For example, when it comes to new employees, peak seasons, massive campaigns and other highly value-adding activities.

We consider the six identified categories and the corresponding practices to be highly interdependent. Without comprehensive training, meticulous follow-up, social modelling and caregiving, the rigorous attention to details and external appearance would presumably not be carried out as successful as shown in our cases. However, by finding the right balance between micromanagement, social modelling and caregiving, we propose that others can harvest the same advantages when applying these practices as our three cases have. However, failing to balance

the level of micromanagement, the risk of irritating the employees, depriving their autonomy and innovative ideas is present. Possibly ending up as the least successful leader Amabile et al. investigated, who made highly experienced team members feel over-controlled, frustrated and thus reducing the teams' effectiveness (2004).

5.2 Theoretical contribution to the leadership literature

This master thesis adds a new dimension to the present leadership literature. Current leadership literature almost exclusively portrays micromanagement as unpropitious and destructive (*Chambers 2004, 14; Knight 2015; White 2010; Wright 2000; Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser 2010; Amabile et al. 2004; Sidhu 2012*). Whereas our findings champion that some of the highest performing and awarded managers in the retail industry are indeed micromanagers. Their practices are painstakingly meticulous and borderline obsessive. Ranging from supervising and monitoring their employees to rigorously testing and commanding their employees. The managers' leadership style has several commonalities with so-called malpractice and micromanagement.

Moreover, by thoroughly excavating the term micromanager we have been able to add further substance to the term, exploring numerous uncharted territories revealing new unascertained discoveries regarding this bedevilled phenomenon. Where current leadership theory has leapfrogged the advantageous sides of the term, we have reaped its prosperity fulfilling its inherent potential. We have showed that its latent abilities have to be buoyed by other factors to truly flourish, explicitly by social modelling and caregiving. Additionally, we have presented, compared and adduced similarities between micromanagement and other acclaimed theoretical terms. Divulging distinct coinciding facets amongst them exhibiting that the road from malpractice to prosperity is shorter than one might imagine.

Even though current research and our research may imply that they can be deemed controlling and zealous, there is no denying the results these acclaimed managers have to show for as the forerunners of the industry. Undeniably, the negativity

surrounding micromanagement is far away from being debunked. However, we believe that this thesis advocates a change in how micromanagement should be perceived. Future research ought to be more open-minded about micromanagement as a tool for ensuring productivity and results instead of a malpractice.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The intention of our research was to present our perception of the term micromanager by excavating some of the highest performing stores and renowned managers in the retail industry. Indubitably, a noteworthy limitation of this research is that it solely consists of interviews. To observe and witness these managerial traits would have been beneficiary for the strength of the research. However, due to time constraints and our lack of experience within the field this research methodology was not an option for this thesis. Additionally, a second limitation is the number and types of cases. The retail industry is vast and multifarious, given that our research is confined to three cases we are unquestionably far away from covering the entire industry. Thus, the generalizability of the research is weakened.

Furthermore, the number of interviewees in the research is considered a vulnerability regarding our findings. Limited to only nine interviewees the strength of the research would be stronger if this number was greater. In addition, it would be preferable to interview customers and former employees as well to ensure objectivity and impartiality across several fields of the customer base and workforce. Another limitation is that out of our nine interviewees only two were male. Perhaps the results would differ if the conglomeration of sexes were more proportionate.

Moreover, this research solely contains of managers working in the retail industry. It is feasible that our findings would be inconsistent in a research covering numerous different industries. Finally, the research was mostly conducted on managers in small companies, perhaps on a level where nit-picking details is important. How would this behaviour be tolerated in higher levels of management in larger companies with multiple levels of management? Therefore, future

research should observe and interview a greater and more diverse number of workers and managers ensuring a larger sample size and thus a stronger research.

5.4 Practical implications

The retail industry is large part of Norway's economy employing thousands of workers across our elongated coastline and mountainous landscape often with a turnover rate similar to that of a revolving door. Given the short tenure, part-time positions and young age of the employees using a micro-managerial approach towards the employees can be advantageous. However, the managers have to find a certain delicate balance when it comes to this authoritative leadership style. Too much of same thing over a long period of time can become tedious for the employees. Therefore, we believe that our last category "Social Modelling and Caregiving" is indispensable for the success of our managers. What they show us in territorial and governing behaviour they answer us with the same grandiose heedfulness towards their employee's need of recognition and prosperity.

Managers across the world are terrified to be labelled a micromanager. This can be considered natural considering that people are born with an innate fear of being disliked and rejected (Smith 2013). However, our research implies that managers perhaps should not be afraid to speak their mind, take control and administer assignments to their employees. As long as they find it reasonable and courteous, the employees do not mind being delegated. In fact, they seem to prefer it. Thus, the practical implication taken form our research is that one should not be reluctant and apprehensive with implementing a frank and authoritarian approach to one's leadership style.

5.5 Conclusion

We initiated this master thesis with the aim to research and show that micromanagement is not a one sided evil as it almost entirely is labelled by the leadership literature. Our goal was not to turn the term micromanager into an exclusively positive phenomenon. However, we wanted to display that positive aspects within the concept exists. Three highly successful managers and their teams has been interviewed, giving us exciting and valuable insight into their way

of managing and running their business. We identified several common practices across the three cases, sorting them into the six categories; *rigorous attention to details and external appearance, meticulous planning, execution and follow-up, strict financial and logistical control, surveillance and testing, thorough training and never-ending learning and social modelling and caregiving*. With the exception of social modelling and caregiving, all the others categories contain several practices which commonly are labelled as micromanagement. Consequently, we deem it fitting to name all the investigated leaders micromanagers. With their massive success in mind, we bravely state that this thesis shows another side of micromanagement, one that is not solely negative. In fact, it can be quite effective.

Moreover, we want to empathize the importance of maintaining a certain balance when engaging in micromanagement, in addition to knowledge of when to use it, and where to grant freedom and autonomy. Great attention to detail, close presence and constant feedback needs the same level of focus on creating energy through high-quality connections enabling a positive work environment, which in this thesis is shown through social modelling and caregiving. Further, we consider the six identified categories to be deeply interdependent, where the great success our cases experience is due to a synergy of these practices.

Finally, we want to suggest looking at micromanagement as a tool in a leader's repertoire and not as a perpetual leadership behaviour. Does any manager succeed with constantly behaving in the same way independent of the situation and the persons involved? The answer to that question is of course no. Given that our research was only conducting in cases situated in the retail industry and in shopping malls, it is ambitious and perchance foolish to claim that this behaviour would ensure prosperity in any given work environment. Nonetheless, possibly the time has come to abolish the negativity surrounding micromanagement and embrace it for what it truly is if done correctly, an efficient way of ensuring prosperity. Perhaps, the time is ripe to eradicate micromanagement as a malpractice and let it further be forever known as mall practice.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. The interview guide

Phase	Questions/agenda	Purpose
#1 Initiation and warm up (10 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Presenting purpose of study • Permission to record • Informed consent • <i>“Kan du tenke deg å starte med å fortelle litt om deg selv?”</i> • <i>“Hva er din rolle og dine ansvarsområder?”</i> • <i>“Hvor lenge har du jobbet hos ...?”</i> 	Creating an informal atmosphere where the interviewee can become comfortable
#2 Eliciting extended storytelling (20 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Kan du beskrive en vanlig dag på jobb?”</i> • <i>“Hva med en vanlig uke?”</i> • <i>“Vil du fortelle om en kampanje/aktivitet som fungerte spesielt bra?”</i> • <i>“Hvor store er forskjellen mellom hverdag og store kampanjer?”</i> 	Getting stores for the daily activities Getting stories of success
#3 Directed questions, comparative (20 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Hvorfor tror du at deres butikk opplever suksess?”</i> • <i>“Hvis du kunne endret hvordan butikken drives i dag, hva ville du gjort?”</i> • <i>“Hvor viktig er planlegging for deres hverdag?”</i> • <i>“Til hvilken grad fokuseres det på gjennomføring og oppfølging av oppgaver?”</i> • <i>“Hvor aktiv er nærmeste leder i din arbeidshverdag?”</i> • <i>“Hvor mye opplæring måtte en ny person som skulle overtatt din posisjon/oppgaver hatt?”</i> • <i>“Basert på det du sier og andre erfaringer kan det virke som butikkens suksess har noe med hvordan de ansatte følges opp. Hva tenker du?”</i> 	Looking for the use of micromanagement
#4 Closure and sharing (10 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap the findings • Have we understood you correctly? • Is it anything you would like to add? 	

Appendix 2. Empirical evidence not presented in the findings

Category 1. Rigorous attention to Detail and External Appearance

<p>Extreme focus on external appearance, creating an appealing and inspiring store. When aspiring to maintain a perfect store, maintenance is a vital part of the daily duties.</p>		<p>Rigorous attention to detail in order to achieve perfection. The methods are pre-determined and often iterative at hourly, daily and weekly basis.</p>		<p>A high-end fashion store</p>	
	<p>“When colleagues stand with their arms crossed in the front, I go and poke them. It doesn't look good. I think it's very important to be smiling and welcoming. You can't look like you hate your job. Be social and say hi to every customer. Here at this mall a lot of people are crossing through our restaurant. We have to say hi to them as well, instead of being frustrated because they are just passing through”.</p> <p>Part-time employee</p>	<p>A fast food restaurant</p>		<p>A children clothing store</p>	

Category 2. Meticulous Planning, Execution and Follow-up

<p>Thorough planning and preparation in order to perform a high level of service and results</p>	<p>A high-end fashion store</p>	<p>A fast food restaurant</p>	<p>A children clothing store</p>
<p>Use of "to-do-lists" to ensure execution of the tasks at hand</p>			
<p>Follow-up to secure completion of tasks and potential learning of wrong doings</p>			<p><i>"I have 2 annual performance appraisals with each employee. I'm a huge fan of performance appraisals. However, the 2 annual times is not enough. If you have an issue, you can't wait 3 months to handle it. You have to be hands on and handle it straight away".</i></p> <p>Store manager</p>

Category 3. Strict Financial and Logistical control

	<p>A high-end fashion store</p>	<p>A fast food restaurant</p>	<p>A children clothing store</p>
<p>Strict financial and logistical supervision to maintain a high level of control of the store performance and inventory status</p>	<p><i>“Every Tuesday we have a meeting with the store managers. Here we check KPI figures, budgets, numbers, turnover rates etc. A lot of other store managers don't even know how to calculate basic numbers. I believe that we stand out in that regard”.</i></p> <p>Owner</p> <p><i>“I'm responsible for the logistics here at the company. We have switched into a more advanced pricing system during the past two years, a RFID driven system”.</i></p> <p>Male department manager</p>		

Category 4. Surveillance and Testing

<p>Surveillance is actively used to ensure desired behavior. Employees are tested on a regular basis to maintain a high level of knowledge and perfect execution of tasks. The uncertainty regarding timing of the tests keep employees at their feet at all times.</p>		<p>A high-end fashion store</p>		<p>A fast food restaurant</p> <p><i>Every six months the employees have to fill at a form, where they check out boxes that they have been tested in every workstation. Whether it's the register, inventory, french fries, kitchen duty, whatever.</i></p> <p>Store manager</p>		<p>A children clothing store</p>	
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Category 5. Comprehensive Training and never-ending Learning

Training is a vital part of making the new employees fit into a high performing environment. The training and learning never stops. New techniques are acquired when new products are introduced. Everyone can raise their own level.	<p>A high-end fashion store</p> <p>“... It depends a little on the employee. But most of the time they are able to find good and creative solutions when merchandising. Therefore, I let them do it how they prefer, however I'm quick to share my opinion if something doesn't work”.</p> <p>Owner</p> <p>“There's one employee who is responsible for the brand “Bread & Boxers” and it is critical that she gets the training she needs regarding that brand. So that she know how to reorder, how to work with the supplier, log onto their websites, how much to order at what times, so that there isn't too much or too little of it in our store. So I go thru all of this the first times with her so that she feels safe doing it herself. However, I'm always there, so she is not completely alone either so that she shouldn't be afraid to ask for help. I try to teach her a lot of the information behind the brand, however it's also her responsibility to gather knowledge on her own. The employees like that, they gain ownership of the brand, they read up on the brand when they're home and I can see when they get responsibilities like that, that they really grow as employees, right?”</p> <p>Female department manager</p>	<p>A fast food restaurant</p> <p>“It is very important that the new ones who come in are not only put on dish washing or cleaning duty, even though it's very helpful for us. They need to learn how to prepare the burger, work the register and so on, quickly”.</p> <p>Store manager</p> <p>“To be a shift leader, you have to attend a special training program. You have to go through a huge folder, which can take up to a couple of months. The training consists of new things and tests every day”.</p> <p>Part-time employee</p> <p>“It's not only our boss who is strict. We are good at having high expectations to each other as well. Pushing everyone to performing their best. It's a part of our culture”.</p> <p>Full-time employee</p> <p>“I experienced that people were too prepared for interviews and that they were a totally different person than whom they portrayed them to be. Therefore, I started doing group interview with upwards to forty people at a time. It's easier to notice who has a drive, who wants the job and how they interact with other people. I can identify red flags right way. Some are on their cell phone etc”.</p> <p>Store manager</p>	<p>A children clothing store</p> <p>“Not long ago, we had a course in merchandising on how to build a specific kind of table. We have a type of table that consists of one large and one smaller part, which is integrated into each other. We learned to use maximum four different colors and that both tables have to harmonize. They are to be looked upon as one unit”.</p> <p>Assistant store manager</p> <p>“There are 5 collections each year. Every time a large delivery is dropped in the store, we have a staff meeting, going through all the relevant product knowledge. This makes the girls feel confident. They give recommendations on how to wash the cloths and share their knowledge about the products with the customers. If a customer's make a warranty claim, then you can say: “Have you remembered to not use any softener?”. I that way, it is easier to reject false claims. Because our rules are so clear and everybody has the same product knowledge, you can tell a customer who claims they didn't get the right washing instructions, that they actually did. Because everybody got the same training, and everyone attended the same staff meeting”.</p> <p>Store manager</p>
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<p>Knowledge and information sharing are crucial in ensuring that the employees have a high level of product knowledge.</p>	<p><i>"Hierarchy is not an important thing in our company. We want the information to be shared and reach the outer parts of the company, our part-timers".</i></p> <p>Owner</p>	<p><i>"The new employees have to work at the kitchen for two months to master it. We get an e-mail and additional training every time a new burger is introduced. We have to learn how to make the new burger and which ingredients to use. This is important both in the kitchen and to be able to sell a lot of the new burger".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p>	<p><i>"I have got a really thorough training on all the routines and practices in the store. How things should be cleaned. How to build wall and table exhibitions. To give feedback while I'm working with my colleagues and how to do it and so on".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p> <p><i>"When we get a main delivery, we often make videos and post on our intranet, explaining the product features. Especially with rainwear and other types of technical clothing. Then the girls can look at the video at home as many times they want and get familiar with the new knowledge".</i></p> <p>Store manager</p> <p><i>"The girls say I always have new ways to satisfy customer needs. I love it when a customer thanks you for good service. That is why I enjoy so much working at the floor. I have been given the opportunity of a desk job many times, but where is the fun in that? Now, with my new position I'm supposed to do some office work. However, I want serve the customers when at work, delivering outstanding customer service. Instead, I can take a couple of hours with my laptop in the couch".</i></p> <p>Store manager</p> <p><i>"We get a lot of relevant information through our intranet. Each week, a newsletter is sent out with information regarding activities the current week. In addition, we get updated on last week sales, who sold the most, who had the best sale etc. There are both information and motivation".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p>
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<p>The managers are facilitating development and give the employees opportunities to grow and evolve.</p>		<p><i>"At the moment, I'm a service associate, which is the starting level. However, it's a lot of possibilities for development at work. We have a lot of opportunities".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p>	<p><i>"If you're seventeen and talented and want to become a shift manager, we give them every opportunity to become so. We help them with all the necessary formal testing and so forth".</i></p> <p>Store manager</p>
		<p><i>"We have a group at facebook which we use as an intranet. We post pictures of the walls and tables we have built. Items that are selling extraordinary well. Also items that have defects or lacks. It is a very easy and efficient way to share information".</i></p> <p>Store manager</p>	<p><i>"My employees need to know what the water resistance is, what the durability etc. To minimize the number of warranty claims, we must always explain that one shall not use waterproofing products or softener. This is things they just have to know and do".</i></p> <p>Store manager</p>
		<p><i>"I love my job and my boss. She runs the best store in the whole chain, worldwide. Of course, I want to be as good as she is. I really do. My mom has run her own business for 32 years. I have always imagined to be my own boss some day".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p>	

Category 6. Social Modelling and Caregiving

<p>The managers are extremely hard working. They begin their day hours before they are supposed to in order to prepare their daily activities. The employees admire them, wanting to learn from them, even aspire to be them. The managers urge to maintain a positive work environment and go beyond what is expected in making the employees enjoy their workplace.</p>	<p>A high-end fashion store</p>	<p>A fast food restaurant</p>	<p>A children clothing store</p>
		<p><i>I show up at work around six am. Then I open up the kitchen and activate every machine, prepare all the food and make everything ready for the rest of the day.</i></p> <p>Store manager</p> <p><i>Yes, I think it is really fun to work at the register, talk to the customers, hear about their day, and talk about the weather or whatever.</i></p> <p>Store manager</p>	<p><i>The country manager says that I always have at least one person in my stores that I take extra responsibility and care of, and these persons are staying with the firm for many years, becoming extremely valuable assets.</i></p> <p>Store manager</p> <p><i>Two of the girls who have worked in other large companies say they feel very comfortable working here. They say that they are looking forward going to work. Because, they feel safe at work.</i></p> <p>Store manager</p> <p><i>"My boss surly loves her job. She is super passionate, and it's passed over on to me. When I'm at work, I always do my best, hoping the dedication and spirit will transfer to my subordinates. I want to contribute into a positive work environment, where people work hard together".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p> <p><i>When asked if her boss is a good role model, the assistant store manager answered: "Yes! Absolutely! Definitely! Always cheerful and positive, regardless of the situation".</i></p> <p>Full-time employee</p> <p><i>I think all the girls in our store like our boss and respect her a lot. She is not a person who'll let a bad day influence our mood. She is always smiling. You can talk to her about everything. She is very pleasant to deal with.</i></p> <p>Assistant store manager</p>

Appendix 3. The e-mail sent out to the managers` containing our findings

Igjen, tusen takk for at du tok deg tid til at vi fikk intervju deg og dine ansatte. Vi har fått utrolig mange spennende historier og har nå jobbet med å sortere de forskjellige praksisene.

Vi har som allerede nevnt intervjuet 3 ulike typer butikker, hvorav en er en restaurant. Alle går for å være blant de aller beste i sitt segment.

Oppgaven vi skriver handler om ledelse og et begrep vi kaller "micromanagement". Dette er en form for ledelse som betsår av tett oppfølging, detaljstyring og mye tilstedeværelse med de ansatte. Micromanagement går for å være "fy-fy" i ledelse-litteraturen. Vi derimot tror at når man driver butikk er man totalt avheninge av å detaljstyre endel ting for å lykkes. Man må selvfølgelig ikke være en micromanager hele tiden, men heller tilpasse seg situasjon og person. Vi ble absolutt ikke overrasket over at alle intervjuene avdekket kjennetegn ved micromanagement.

Vi har kommet frem til 6 ulike praksiser som brukes på tvers av alle 3 butikker. Vi tror disse er mye av nøkkelen til deres suksess. Men igjen, hvem vet bedre hvorfor deres butikk opplever suksess enn sjefen sjøl. Hva tenker du om disse kategoriene? Høres det riktig ut? Hvilke er viktigst? Hva er de største utfordringene ved disse praksisene? Her er det stor takhøyde, så bare fyr løs!

Hvis det er noe annet du ønsker å legge til eller kommentere er du veldig velkommen til det!

Vi hadde satt utrolig stor pris på om du kunne tenke deg å bruke 10-30 min på å svare på denne mailen. Gjerne kommenter under hver kategori. Har du tid til å svare i løpet av mandag hadde det vært fantastisk, hvis ikke får vi også brukt svaret ditt om det kommer innen neste helg.

Da hele oppgaven skrives på engelsk har jeg valgt å beholde de originale navnene. Prøver å forklare kort under.

1: Rigorous Attention to Detail & External Appearance

Lederne kan mer eller mindre katekoriseres som perfektjonister. De styrer f.eks hvordan butikken lukter, hvordan de ansatte går kledd eller hvordan ketchupen plasseres på burgeren. Ekstremt fokus på å holde butikken fin og inspirerende. Det skal alltid være rent og ryddig, alltid. For å klare dette er det en hel del daglige og ukentlig rutiner som må følges tett. Rutiner som lederne vet fungerer, og gjerne som de har laget/tilpasset selv

2: Meticulous Planning, Execution & Follow-up

Planlegging og forberedelser er svært sentrale aktiviteter. Det brukes masse tid og energi på dette. Lederne og i flere tilfeller også ansatte er ekstra tidlig ute på jobb for å forberede dagen. I en travel hverdag med mengder av ulike oppgaver er gjennomføring av alle oppgavene ekstremt viktig. For å holde kontroll brukes to-do-lister aktivt. Oppgavene skal ikke gå ut over butikkens utseende.

Oppgaver og ansatte følges tett opp. Dette gjøres gjennom tilstedeværelse, og gjerne over en kaffekopp. Tilbakemeldingene kommer med en gang, i stedet for å skyve det under teppet. Lederne er tydelige, konkrete og konsekvente. Dette oppleves rettferdig, selv om ansatte kan synes det er "strengt". Hvis oppgaver ikke er fullførte ønsker man å finne ut hvorfor, og lære av det som (ikke) skjedde. Medarbeidersamtaler er viktige.

3: Strict Financial & Logistical Control

Lederne har stålkontroll på økonomi og logistikken. Det snakkes mye og høyt om tall og budsjetter. Man ønsker å overføre denne interessen til de ansatte.

Brettekanter, ryddige og oversiktlige lagere. Strenge rutiner for varepåfyll. Varer skal alltid være tilgjengelige for både ansatte og kunder. Hyppige varetellinger. Faste rutiner for mottak av varer.

4: Surveillance & Testing

Service, produktkunnskap, ryddighet og gjennomførelse av oppgaver testes jevnlig. Det kan være oppfølgingsspørsmål etter en infomail, en kleshenger som legges under et stativ, eller å sende en venn/bejket innom butikken på kvelden.

5: Comprehensive Training and never-ending Learning

Opplæring av nyansatte er alfa omega. I begynnelsen følges den ansatte svært tett opp, men får mer selvstendighet når den får opparbeidet erfaring og viser mestring. De andre ansatte får også ansvar for å "rette" den nyansatte i å gjøre feil.

Man er aldri ferdig utlært. Nye produkter kommer. Ny kunnskap trengs. Nye salgsteknikker testes ut. Det legges opp til at de ansatte kan lære og vokse. Lederne ønsker de ansatte opp og frem. Lederne har selv startet på gulvet og jobbet seg opp.

6: Social Modelling and Caregiving

Arbeidsplassen blir sett på som et trygt sted å være. De ansatte er stolte av å jobbe der. Lederne gir mye av seg selv og er hartarbeidende gode forbilder. De ansatte ser opp til lederne sine. Noen ønsker til og med å bli som dem. Lederne bryr seg virkelig om de ansatte, også som personer. Jobben kan faktisk bli karakterisert som en familie.

Appendix 4. The managers' thoughts about our findings

The e-mail from owner at the high-end fashion store:

1: Rigorous Attention to Detail & External Appearance

"Her tror jeg det er kulturen vi plasserer som er det viktigste. (Store name) har etter hvert fått et meget stabilt nøkkelpersonal, og disse er våre viktigste kulturbærere. Våre nyansatte blir dermed raskt presentert for kulturen vår, og dermed dratt inn i den. Passer ikke kulturen vår/ verdiene våre den ansatte opplever vi at vedkommende sier raskt opp selv".

2: Meticulous Planning, Execution & Follow-up

"Dette stemmer godt. Vi bruker mye tid på hvordan våre ansatte skal prioritere tiden sin".

"Stemmer. Vi bruker også en del tid på hvem som bør gjøre de forskjellige oppgavene. Det er stor forskjell på de ansattes gjennomføringsevne".

"Stemmer. Vi liker å si at vi gjør mer av det som fungerer, og mindre av det som ikke fungerte. Vi lærer de ansatte å evaluere hele tiden. Evaluer hvordan du klarte å selge 2 slips til skjorten etc".

3: Strict Financial & Logistical Control

"Åpenhet er en av våre verdier. Alle skal hvite "hvorfor om alt". Vi har også en (Store name) skole for alle våre butikkledere. Alle bør enkelt regne ut brutto fortjeneste, kalkulasjon etc.

Dette tar vi som en selvfølge".

4: Surveillance & Testing

"Ja, vi mener at vi er ganske gode på dette. Men vi liker ikke å overvåke våre ansatte. Men i en liten by som (City name) får vi fort høre om en ansatt ikke gjør jobben sin".

5: Comprehensive Training and never-ending Learning

"Stemmer, vi jobber med en modell hvor opplæring og egen innsats er like viktige".

6: Social Modelling and Caregiving

"Dette er viktig for oss. Vi lever gjennom The (Store name) family. Et begrep vi følger de ansatte føler stolthet rundt".

The e-mail from manager at the fast food restaurant:

1: Rigorous Attention to Detail & External Appearance

"Veldig viktig at konseptet som allerede er bestemt for oss blir fulgt opp og gjøres etter boka. Mener her at dette er viktig og at de ansatte føler en trygghet over faste regler og rutiner".

2: Meticulous Planning, Execution & Follow-up

"Jeg mener at grunnlaget for en bra dag og et bra skift er at ting er på plass og i orden når vi åpner. Dette ser jeg også hos mine ansatte som VELGER å komme tidligere enn de blir satt opp på vaktlista for å passe på at de rekker alt, alt er klart og de kan sette seg ned å ta litt frokost og slappe av litt før vi åpner restauranten".

3: Strict Financial & Logistical Control

"Vi ønsker at alle skal ta del i salg og budsjett. Vi tar ut mersalg lister hver dag. Hvem er super selger idag? Denne uken? Alltid spennende . På samme liste måler vi salg mot ifjor og budsjett og vårt mål. Hvor mange gjester har vi innom, hva klarte vi i snittsalg osv . Timessalg synes de fleste er morsomt å vite . Hva klarte vi denne timen? Gikk det bra? Hva kunne gått bedre ? Var det noe som gikk galt? Opplever også at medarbeider spør skifledere om time salg. De blir spesielt glade når de er svette, løpt rundt og hatt mange gjester, men så har alt gått smooth!"

4: Surveillance & Testing

"Umulig for oss dødelige å være på jobb 24-7. Så det å sende noen bekjente eller gå innom selv og ta tester er med på å øke kunnskap og viktige fokus områder. Dette er også en fordel da vi se ting fra gjesten sitt stå sted og ikke bare fra bak disken".

5: Comprehensive Training and never-ending Learning

"Helt enig!"

6: Social Modelling and Caregiving

"Kunne ikke sagt det bedre selv!"

The e-mail from manager at the children`s clothing store:

1: Rigorous Attention to Detail & External Appearance

”Tror absolutt at flere av disse punktene er veldig viktige. Men for oss, som jobber i en barnebutikk, så skal nettopp den frihetene være litt det. Ansatte møter på jobb i et antrekk som er representabelt men ikke et bestemt antrekk. Vi ønsker at kundene skal kjenne seg igjen i oss, og en samtale kan like ofte begynne med at en ansatt gir et kompliment til en kunde, som en kunde som havner i prat og gir kompliment på klesstilen til den ansatte vi har stående på jobb. Det at det skal være rent og ryddig er absolutt viktig for våres del, men vi kan også se til tider på flere butikker at der vi står å bygger om, og at butikken står litt på hode. Noe vi også velger å gjøre på dager som starter med å være litt rolige. Så pleier tallene å komme seg greit utover dagen, ikke alltid bare fordi vi har skiftet på dokker og endret på bord og vegger, men fordi kunden står med følelsen av at her skjer det noe, her står ikke di ansatte å venter på at jeg skal trække over dørterskelen. Dessverre i noen butikker, og jeg kan snakke av egen erfaring fra tidligere jobber hender dert at kunden unnskylder seg når di vil se på et plagg, fordi det er så brette kanter, eller så til di grader striglet at gjestene i butikken nesten ikke tør å røre noe. Men det skal så klart ryddes, og butikken skal gi kunden et godt intrykk”.

2: Meticulous Planning, Execution & Follow-up

”Ja, aktivetskaldere er noe vi bruker mye i alle butikkene, vi pleier tillegg å bokføre og skrive notater som var grunnen til suksee, eller hva vi kan gjøre bedre neste år, neste kampanje. Var det varen det var feil med, var det matriale, burde vi markedsført oss anderledes, er det grunnen til at det er ferie og alle er bortreist? Eller skyldes det at det er ferietid, dårlig vær og alle ble hjemme på kjøpesenteret. Det å hele tiden tenke tilbake på ting vi har gjort, for derfra å kunne se hva vi kan gjøre bedre som team. Hva har kundene sagt, slike ting er viktig å ta med en gang, skrive det ned, så man nettopp ikke glemmer det til neste aktivitet og ender opp med enda en fiasko iforhold til ansatte plassert på jobb, og varer som er kjøpt inn. Uten tvil så tror jeg mye av planleggingen nettopp skylder ledere, ansatte som vet nettopp det at ingen ting kan gjøres i siste liten. Planlegge godt, være føre var på både å følge med på hitlister, være tidlig ut om morgene, kanskje før andre ledere, så når de velger å komme på jobb, vel den varen som nå er tom på lageret bestile vi tre esker av før alle andre kom seg på jobb. Ikke minst, så tror jeg mye av dette skyldes utviklingen til sjefene og ansatte på tilbakemeldinger, ville gjøre seg bedre, ha en god attest, et godt arbeidsmiljø. Og ikke minst, som jeg sier til jentene, gjør du sånn at når noen andre jobber med deg, så skal di glede seg til du kommer på jobb. Fordi hun er alltid blid, positiv, ser løsninger eller kommer med forslag og prøver så godt hun kan. Gir du alt? Gir du di andre på jobb en glede av at nettopp jeg kom på jobb i dag. Og her kommer nettopp den delen med medarbeidersamtaler, følge opp, ta en kaffe, starte dagen med en prat der man også kan velge å sende en melding til en av jentene for å fortelle hvordan di andre på jobb skrytt av hvordan jobb han eller henne gjorde sist dem jobbet. Vi må spille hverandre gode, og det betyr å ta tilbakemeldinger akkurat her og nå. At medarbeidersamtaler, samtaler generelt på tomanshånd skal skje så hippig at det er ikke skummelt, men en måte å gjøre oss bedre på”.

3: Strict Financial & Logistical Control

”Økonomi, bruttofortjeneste, salg, alle disse tingene er viktige faktorer for økonomi og det er viktig at de ansatte har forståelse for det. Det betyr ikke bare snakke i tall, men virkelig vise hva økning betyr. Hvorfor det noen ganger lønner seg å sette varer til en kampanje pris enn å bare dumpe det på 50%. At dette gjør noe med bunnlinja til butikken, om butikken har igjennomsnitt en måned med omsetning, men på feks nattåpent kliner til med -30% på hele butikken, og man henter en stor del av omsetningen den måneden, så taper vi mer på bunnlinja totalt. vi lærer opp til at det viktig at man sjekker bruttfortjenesten på varene før man setter dem ned, at man hyppig følger med på totalt på tallene på måneden. Ligger vi godt ann på måneden i bruttofortjeneste, og vi har råd til å kaste oss med på en kampanje og kjøre noen tilbud, vel så kan vi det uten at vi taper penger. Vi har gjennomføring på medarbeidersamtaler, vi får daglig og ukentlig tall med forklaringer på, slik at deltider kan forstå hva det innebærer. Men økonomisk i personalmøter, så viser vi hva det betyr å ha en god selger på jobb, at vi som butikkleidere og sjefer kan bidra med, men hvor viktig det er at vi ikke glemmer di som jobber på kvelden, og som faktisk kan dra inn helt vanvittige summer om de har de riktige verktøyene, tilbakemeldinger og produktkunnskapen, alt dette er viktig for å gjøre oss bedre. Vi er en bedrift som er hyppige på varetellinger, og liker å ha

kontrollen. Både iforhold av kontroll på varer som kommer inn, svinn blandt kunder, og også for å vise de ansatte at vi har kontroll. Jeg tror at på butikker som har varetelling en gang i året har de mindre kontroll og oversikt. Hva ville det sagt om oss som ledere? Om vi skal vente et år på å forebygge svinn, om vi kanskje må flytte et bord, en vegg, om vi har en blindsoner, om man har en ansatt som stjeler, men som slutter, så oppdager man det ikke før om 6 måneder fordi det er neste telling. Varetellinger gir en kjempe kontroll, jeg er heller ikke i tvil at den rutinen vi har på varetellinger gjør at vi ikke bygger lager heller, men at vi har en høy turn over på lagrene våres, nettopp fordi vi ikke glemmer varer som blir liggende på et bakrom. I stedet så er det heller, den ja, stemmer på tide å få ut igjen, eller vi har mer av den. Har man også med deltider på sånne ting så har de større forståelse for hva som befinner seg på lageret, hva det er vi har på lageret, hva det er lov å la ligge på lageret uten at det skal koste oss penger. Varer som det er viktig å ha innenfor rekkevidde daglig, hvilke varer vi kan legge på et fjernlager fordi varen ikke er relevant for om et par måneder”

4: Surveillance & Testing

”Her kjenner vi oss igjen så til di grader, dette er virkelig noe vi lederne gjør. Og det er ikke alltid noe di ansatte trenger å vite, det handler om å gi ansvar men samtidig som leder ta noen kontroller ut at du alltid trenger å vite at du gjør det. Og etterhvert, gi disse verktøyene videre til sine heltider, ledere, sjefer, lærer, så di gjør det videre. Så har man flere ledd som passer på, og gjør jobben bedre. Vi bruker mye mysterishoppere, vi som ledere dukker opp når som helst og hvor som helst, ikke fordi dette skal være skremmende, men fordi det skal være en helt vanlig dag at vi utfører god service, at butikken ser fin ut, at vi ikke har ansatte som står å henger på jobb, vi skal ikke trenge å måtte være redde for at en ansatt står med mobil på jobb, har venner hengende i butikken. Fordi nettopp dette er noe vi har vært veldig klare om, hvordan føler du deg som gjest i en annen butikk der du føler du må avbryte de ansatte på jobb fordi de har en privat samtale, eller at du ikke får oppmerksomhet fordi hun i kassa står med mobilen. Dette er noe vi snakker mye om. Vi gir fritt ansvar på mange ting, men som alle oppgaver, man skal gjøre seg fortjent til det. Jeg skal ikke ha at det høres i kassene i butikken at de ansatte teller veksler når klokken er kvart på ni. Jeg vil at om en kunde kommer inn kvart på og skal legge igjen 50, 500 eller 5000 hos oss, så skal dem føle seg velkommen. Dette er noe vi snakker høyt om selv, og di første opplæringsdagene, så sier vi ofte.. ta deg en runde rundt i senteret også hører du hvor mange som gjør seg klar til å stenge. Føl på den følelsen, har du lyst til å gå inn i en butikk der du vet at den personen er så klar for å gå hjem at den teller kassa og nesten har på seg jakka?”

5: Comprehensive Training and never-ending Learning

Vi har en opplæringsmal på tre sider, som den som står for opplæring skal krysse av og fylle ut når man har godt igjennom og den som er på opplæring skal krysse av når de føler at dette kan jeg. Dette er også et viktig virkemiddel på, at alle jentene har hatt samme opplæring. At di sier de samme tingene skulle det være en vareretur, reklamasjon, misfornøyd kunde. Svaret skal være det samme uansett hvem av di ansatte en kunde oppsøker. Det gjør at vi står mere selvsikre og ikke minst for kunden sin del så har vi kontroll på det vi gjør. Du får ikke et annet svar om du drar til en av di andre butikkene. På personalmøter så går vi igjennom produktkunnskaper, di som har jobbet lengre hos oss deler sine erfaringer og måter di kan gi ansatte en fordel på å selge varen til kunden. Hva fungerte når du solgte den? Hva var kunden sine spørsmål, hva la du mest vekt på? Vi deler erfaringer, ofte om en av deltidene er ferdig opplært, så lar vi di ha kveldsvakt med en av di nye. Mye pga av at en deltid kan lettere tenke tilbake på hva hun syns var vanskelig på stengerutiner, når man skulle jobbe første gang alene. De utveksler ideer og gir ofte di nye litt ekstra styrke i det å være ny og at ting er litt nytt.

6: Social Modelling and Caregiving

”Ambassadører, jeg vet ikke hvor mange ganger jeg som leder for høre hvor flotte ambassadører det jobber rundt omkring i butikkene våres. Nå skal det sies at vi har noen ledere over oss som vi får tilbakemeldinger av, vi blir lagt merke til og vi blir virkelig satt pris på. Vi starter i intervju-prosessen å fortelle litt om firma, eierne og hva noe av di viktigste grunnleggende verdiene er for oss som jobber der. Grunnen til at vi som oftest åpner butikker der andre legger ned. At vi både blir belønnet med heder og ære, samtidig som di ansatte har litt over gjennomsnitt i lønn nettopp fordi vi vil sette pris på di gode ansattene, og at om man beviser det i prøvetiden så er det både ekstra ub-tilegg og belønninger. Vi har eiere som sier selv, vi er gode på å ansatte gode ledere og derifra så er ikke the sky the limit. Vi blir ikke nedtrykt om vi har dårlige tall, vi blir heller bedt om å tenke anderledes, komme med ideer, eller utveklse tanker med hverandre. Det gjør også at vi som jobber som våre ledere, om vi vet at di gjør en god jobb, visst jeg vet at di beste av di beste står på jobb i dag, og det er tallene de klarte å levere. Vel, vet du hva? I dag så har vi gjort det beste vi kan. Det betyr at det er en ny dag i morgen, hold humøret oppe og tenk nytt. Har man et godt forbilde strekker man seg gjerne for å bli like god. Positive tilbakemeldinger og skryt fra et forbilde bygger selvtillitt, mens konstruktiv kritikk oppleves som visdomsord man kan lære av. Tror det at butikklederne kjenner hverandre, butikkledere og distriktledere har god kommunikasjon, eierne viser seg i butikkene ovs, gjør at vi føler oss som en liten, men stor, familie. I tillegg øker nok stoltheten og ønskert om å gjøre det bra når man kjenner dem man jobber for”.