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How Leadership Transitions Are Coordinated in Practice: A Comparative Multiple-Case Study of Large Private Companies in Norway

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Study Program:

Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology

Abstract

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This study explored an expected gap between Dale's (2014; 2015) framework and how leadership transitions are coordinated in a Norwegian context. The aim was to test Dale's framework against existing practice and clarify the extent to which there is a gap between Dale's framework and practice. This aim was operationalized by three objectives, to compare and contrast Dale's prescribed: (1) practices, (2) roles, and (3) capabilities related to leadership transitions. To accomplish the research objectives a comparative multiple-case study design was used to compare large private companies in Norway that have operated for more than 10 years. Maximum variation case selection was used to select 11 such cases and data was collected using semi-structured interviews with one HR professional per case studied.

The key findings from the analysis indicated that approaches to coordinating leadership transitions varied greatly, coordination efforts depended on circumstance, coordination efforts lacked balance, and coordination efforts were largely focused on talent. These findings are discussed in relation to what leadership transitions are like from the perspective of human resources and what role Dale's (2014) framework plays in human resources' leadership transitions. The conclusion drawn from the discussion were that there is quite a large gap between Dale's framework and participants' descriptions of what leadership transitions are like.

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Introduction

Topic

   This thesis is about how leadership transitions are coordinated. Dale's (2014) perspective is that leadership transitions are practice, and integrates these practices into the time, phases, and processes from one leader departs a leadership position to another has replaced them for a minimum of one year. An example of a practice is manager-to-manager handover in the offboarding phase to ensure that organizational efficiency is maintained. Coordination is defined by Van de Ven et al. (1976) as integrating different elements of an organization to fulfil a set of collective interdependent tasks, which in this case is leadership transitions. Scott and Davis (2016) describe that the elements of an organization include its environment, strategy and goals, work/technology, formal organization, people, and informal organization. Based on Dale's conceptualization, coordinating leadership transitions involves integrating the organization's elements to fulfil the practices involved in the time, phases, and processes from one leader departs a leadership position to another has replaced them for a minimum of one year.

   The reason this thesis studied how leadership transitions are coordinated, is because there is an expected gap between Dale's (2014) framework and how leadership transitions are coordinated in practice. According to Ciampa and Dotlich (2015), coordinating leadership transitions is the responsibility of the human resources (HR) department. Storey et al. (2008) state that the gap between HR theory and practice has been described as a chasm, even a great divide. Considering this general gap between HR theory and practice there is reason to expect that there is a gap between Dale's framework for leadership transitions and how leadership transitions are coordinated in practice. This expected gap between theory and practice presents a need for empirical research exploring this gap.

   Dale's (2014) contributions to leadership transition theory are written and based in a Norwegian context. Investigating a gap between Dale's leadership transition framework and practice in a Norwegian context, therefore, holds potential for meaningful comparison. Student theses have contributed with empirical research to Dale's framework in a Norwegian context. However, these have focused either on specific phases such as onboarding of new leaders (Røysland-Egebø, 2020), practices such as handover between leaders (Lysko, 2018), or how new leaders experience leadership transitions (Jakobsen &

Selieseth, 2016; Sando & Agerbo, 2019). Furthermore, these theses have primarily been inductive and thus focused on contributing to Dale's framework rather than testing it against existing practice. Still, these theses have indicated that leadership transitions as a strategic whole is not practiced in an integrated manner (i.e., not coordinated). No one has yet explored how leadership transitions are coordinated in practice. Meaning integrating all the organization's elements to fulfil the leadership transition practices involved in the time, phases, and processes from one leader departs a leadership position to another has replaced them for a minimum of one year. As a result, the existing research is inadequate for addressing a potential divide between Dale's framework and HR practice.

Research Problem Statement, Objectives, and Questions

The following research problem statement will be used to guide this study:

- To what extent is there a gap between Dale's (2014) framework and HR participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated?

The working hypothesis (see Casula et al., 2020) for this study was the following: there is a gap between Dale's (2014) framework and leadership transitions are coordinated as a strategic whole. Given the lack of empirical research mentioned in the previous section, this study aims to test Dale's (2014; 2015) framework against HR participants' descriptions of existing practice and clarify the extent to which there is a gap between Dale's framework and practice. This gap will be explored in the context of large private companies in Norway that have operated for more than 10 years.

To guide this exploration the research aim was broken down into three research objectives. The first objective was to compare and contrast the practices included in the various phases of a leadership transition (what). The second objective was to compare and the roles in a leadership transition (who). The third objective was to compare and contrast the capabilities in terms of templates, tools, systems, checklists, and so on that can be used to coordinate leadership transitions (how). These three objectives can be seen as practically oriented sub-goals or milestones towards the path of achieving the research aim and answering the overarching research problem statement. The specific research questions this thesis will seek to answer is:

1. What are the leadership transition processes of large private companies in Norway like from a human resource perspective?

2. What role does Dale's (2014) leadership transition framework play in human resources' leadership transition processes in large private companies in Norway?

Meaning that participants were invited to provide empirical data about practices, roles, and capabilities related to coordinating leadership transitions during the interviews. To accomplish the research objectives, the case data was then compared and contrasted to test Dale's (2014) framework. The research questions were answered directly in the conclusions chapter to accomplish the research objectives. Accomplishing the research objectives meant accomplishing the research aim and, thereby, answering the research problem statement.

The scope of this study was refined to companies with more than 500 employees based on Dale's (2014) statement organizations smaller than 250 employees might have too few employees to have a resourceful HR department, had a leadership transition, or established practices regarding leadership transitions. Companies that had operated less than 10 years were also excluded based on Hill et al.'s (2018) points that most organizations change their leaders every 5 years and organizations that had been around more years manage their leadership transitions more carefully. Lastly, I also focused the study on private companies since public organizations might have differences or similarities with private companies regarding leadership transition practices that are not related to a gap between theory and practice. Potential limitations with the method of this study concern time and resource constraints and limited experience regarding research and methodology.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured as follows to address the research questions. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature on leadership transitions and describe Dale's (2014) framework in terms of what (practices), who (roles), and how (capabilities) of leadership transitions. In Chapter 3, I will outline the choice of a comparative, multiple-case design, maximum variation case selection, interviews as a method, and how the data was analyzed. In Chapter 4, I will present the findings based on key themes uncovered in the analysis. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I will conclude and offer

my thoughts on the practical implications and possible directions for future research.

Theory

Introduction

Since the aim of this study is to test Dale's (2014; 2015) framework against HR participants' descriptions of existing practice, the role of theory in this thesis is analytic generalization. In this chapter, I will first outline the theoretical context of leadership transitions. Then I will cover Dale's framework in terms of leadership transitions as practice and the practices integrated in the three aspects time, phases, and processes from one leader departs a leadership position to another has replaced them for a minimum of one year. This will serve as the outline of what practices Dale argues should be fulfilled. Lastly, I will cover HR's role in coordinating leadership transitions and what Dale has written about how to coordinate leadership transitions. In sum, this will outline Dale's framework in full which will serve as the theoretical framework for the research objectives and questions guiding the study.

Literature Review

What: Leadership Transitions

In their PhDs on leadership transitions, Wiggins (2019) and Thao-Schuck (2021) state that there is a lack of a commonly agreed upon definition of leadership transitions. Indeed, Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) define leader transitions as "a period of transition from one leadership role into another" (p. 393) and Wiggins (2019) defines leadership transitions as "any significant change in a leader's role caused by promotion, secondment, changing organizations, merger, acquisition, restructure, or returning from maternity/paternity/career leave" (p. 26). Both definitions reflect a focus on the leader and their personal transition from one role to another. Ciampa and Dotlich (2015), meanwhile, define leadership transitions as "the process of maintaining strategic, operational, and cultural continuity as one leader passes the mantle of authority to a successor" (p. 6) and Gilmore (1988) takes leadership transitions to mean "all the stages from an organization's perception of the need for new leadership through the arrival and successful joining of a new leader" (p. xi), reflecting an emphasis on the organizational process of maintaining continuity as leaders transition. Van Coller-Peter et al. (2018) argue that leadership transitions are an aspect of leadership development and draw a distinction between leader development and leadership development. They point out that leadership transitions present challenges for

both since it consists of both interpersonal and intrapersonal areas of development. Dale (2014) has integrated both aspects into a holistic framework. This is reflected in his definition of leadership transitions as "the time, phases and processes from one leader exits and until a new leader has been in the job for minimum one year" (p. 36) and is adopted as the definition of leadership transitions for this thesis.

Dale's (2014) Leadership Transition Framework and Leadership Transitions as Practice

Dale (2014) takes the perspective of leadership transitions as practice. This thesis builds on Reckwitz's (2002) definition of practice to define leadership transition practice is a type of behavior consisting of several interconnected bodily and/or mental activities, understandings, tools, and experiential states that together constitutes a "way of". For example, since Dale (2014) describes that the offboarding phase is partly about ensuring that organizational efficiency is maintained, then leadership transition practices related to the offboarding phase include preparing a manager-to-manager handover. This is an example of the type of leadership transition practice that the participants in this study were invited to provide empirical data about how they coordinate to fulfil.

As mentioned in the introduction, Dale (2014) conceptualizes leadership transitions in terms of three aspects: time, phases, and processes, relating to one leader being replaced by another for a minimum of one year. The author's framework is illustrated in Figure 1:
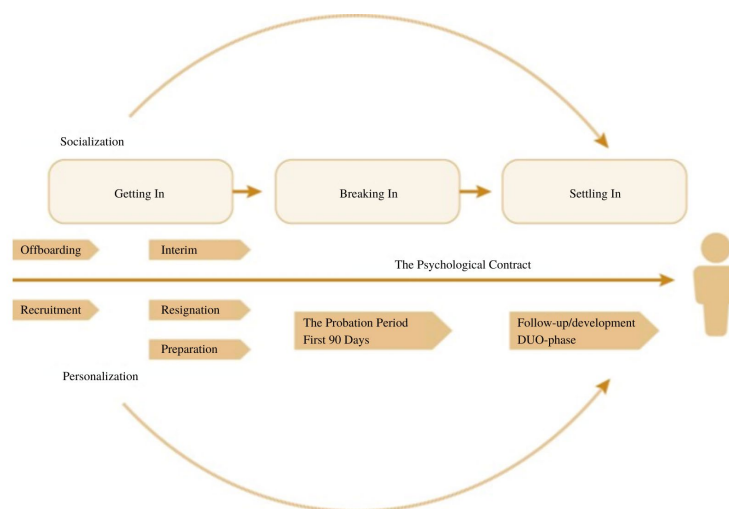

Figure 1. Holistic framework for leadership transitions. Translated from *Livet som ny leder*, by F. Dale, 2015, Magma (https://old.magma.no/livet-som-ny-leder). Copyright 2015 by Magma.

In the next sections, I will cover the practices included in the various phases of a leadership transition (what), the roles in a leadership transition (who), and the capabilities in terms of templates, tools, systems, checklists, and so on that can be used to coordinating to fulfil the practices (how).

The Time Aspect

Starting with the time aspect, leaders may depart at any time immediately through death or immediate dismissal/firing, or three-month notice periods. Dale (2014) also refers to Gabarro's (1987) model of stages of learning and action to support that leadership transitions span at least a year into the new leader's leadership. The author points out that the time aspect is dynamic, describing that leadership transitions are about being able to see the time aspect and plan thereafter. Since he uses the phases as the basis for this planning, I will cover the time aspect in connection with the phases.

The Phases Aspect

Dale (2014) divides this aspect into stages and phases. He builds on Feldman's (1976) stage model of newcomer adjustment, which includes getting-in, breaking-in, and settling-in. Describing that the getting-in stage consists of everything that happens before the first day. The getting-in stage thereby includes the phases: phasing out (hereafter "offboarding" for a more natural English wording), or recruitment, constitution (hereafter "interim period"), termination, and preparation. The offboarding phase concerns organizing the outgoing manager's resignation period to ensure that organizational efficiency is maintained, and that the employment relationship is discontinued in a professional manner. The offboarding phase includes practices such as exit-conversations between the direct superior and outgoing manager, gathering input for the work and role analysis from the outgoing manager, mapping stakeholders, and preparing a manager-to-manager handover.

The recruitment phase is about identifying talent, selecting them, and preparing them so they become quickly effective. Dale (2014) divides the recruitment phase into two sub-phases: screening and selection, where the former is about sorting unqualified candidates out, and the latter is about selecting among qualified candidates based on the requirements identified in the work, role, and context analysis. It includes initiatives such as basing the work, role, and context

analysis on a dialogue-based 360-analysis, context-based cases, leadership platforms, assessments and tests, 90/100-day plans, and reverse interviews.

The interim-period phase is about creating good conditions for the interim leader, avoiding organizational loss of efficiency, and informing and involving the new leader. Initiatives include mapping stakeholders, manager-to-manager handover documents, giving interim managers clear mandates, and debriefing interim and/or other internal candidates if they applied for the position but did not get it.

The termination and preparation (hereafter "preboarding") phases concern supporting incoming managers in their departure of their former position and providing them with opportunities to gain knowledge and insight into the role and organization. Meaning, incoming leaders often find themselves in two roles at the same time, that of departing leader from their old organization and incoming leader in the new. They, therefore, have two organizations and many actors they relate to during this phase. This includes preparing and making concrete the meeting plan for the first weeks and months, preparing support contacts such as HRBPs, mentors, manager colleagues, etc., preparing a training plan in processes, systems, and other relevant learning paths, and making concrete the 90/100-day plan as a continuation from the recruitment phase.

The offboarding, recruitment, interim-period, and preboarding phases together constitute the first stage of Dale's (2014) framework. He describes that offboarding and recruitment usually last three months and the same amount of time for interim, termination, and preparation. A point to note is that the first two phases and last three can happen in parallel, they often do not. Thus, the getting-in stage typically lasts six months, clarifying why interim leaders are often used in practice and thereby underlining the importance of being aware of all this activity happening before the new leader even starts their first 90/100 days.

Next, the breaking-in is described as the stage where the new leader meets the new organization and includes the phasing in (hereafter "onboarding") phase. Onboarding concerns helping new leaders establish themselves in their new job through clarifying expectations, building trust and relations, understanding the current situation, evaluating, and (re)orienting. This includes practices such as town hall, status-talk between the new leader and their direct superior, leadership agreements, start-up conversations and start-up team gatherings with the new

leader's direct reports, the manager-to-manager handover, dialogues with the interim and/or outgoing manager, geographical round trips and stakeholder conversations, and a lot more. Regarding the time aspect, Dale (2014) describes that, since this stage runs parallel to the formal probation period in Norway, it can be said to last six months.

Lastly, the settling-in stage runs from the probation period ends and consists of the follow-up and development phase. Dale (2014) describes that this period is primarily concerns balancing four key processes, namely daily operations, development, re-structuring and change, and crises in relation to the individual, team, organization, and leadership levels. Practices here are more pervasive but can be simplified to general HR and leader-colleague support, coaching, network groups, and leadership development initiatives.

Regarding the time aspect, Dale (2014) states that this stage lasts a minimum of 6-12 months. Thereby, with the getting-in and breaking-in stages also lasting six months each, the total period of a leadership transition quickly spans a year to a year and a half at a minimum.

The Processes Aspect

Dale (2014) describes the process aspect as the most challenging to grasp. It consists of socialization, personalization, and the psychological contract. Haaland (2019) describes socialization as how the organization adapts the newcomer (new leader in this context) and personalization as how the newcomer (new leader) adapts the organization. According to Bakke (1953), socialization and personalization are part of a two-part fusion – or acculturation – process. Dale states that employment relationships are exchange relationships constituted by both a formal legal employment contract and an informal psychological contract. He argues that the essence of psychological contracts is mutual expectations. Since employees have obligations to a variety of leaders, colleagues, and stakeholders, he states that psychological contracts should be understood in terms of psychological part-contracts that are active and acting throughout the organization. Since leadership transitions, especially top/executive-level leadership transitions, trigger a stronger personalization throughout the organization, this ties to stronger socialization and implications for the psychological contracts. He, thereby, uses the concept of psychological contracts to argue against–what he and Haaland (2019) call–the "predictive perspective" on

hiring (measuring and assessing candidates). Stating that one-sided socialization (only emphasizing one side of the acculturation process) is not an adequate approach for establishing a joint collaboration project that an employment relationship is.

Critiquing Dale's (2014) Framework

These descriptions of psychological contracts can be critiqued for being a bit unclear and it could be argued a different concept might be more appropriate. According to Cullinane and Dundon (2006), different authors adopt different assumptions about what the core or determinant of psychological contracts is. Assuming that the core of psychological contracts is either implicit obligations, expectations, or reciprocal mutuality. Dale's (2014) statement that the essence of psychological contracts is mutual expectations, puts him in the second category. However, he also emphasizes employee obligations towards numerous leaders to argue for reciprocal mutuality. Thus, adopting all three assumptions.

The concept of psychological contracts originates from outside the HR management (HRM) field, was revitalized by Rousseau (1989), and is associated with social exchange theory which contends that social relationships consist of informal obligations (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). Dale (2014) and Haaland (2019) critique the "predictive perspective" and emphasize whether the nature of the exchange feels balanced. This can be seen as them emphasizing whether the nature of the exchange relationships *feels* balanced rather than relational outcomes such as leader-member relationship quality, performance, satisfaction, or commitment. Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) point out that, while an emphasis on relational outcomes is often associated with positivistic approaches and a transmissional view of communication, social constructivist perspectives, on the other hand, emphasize what the relationships *mean* for the specific parties involved. Dale thereby arguably takes a social constructivist and dialogic (cf. monologic; see Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014) perspective of the acculturation process and psychological contracts, rather than a social exchange theory perspective.

A more fitting concept than psychological contracts may, therefore, be Manderscheid and Freeman' (2012) and Manderscheid and Harrower's (2016) lens of polarity, paradox, and tension (hereafter "lens of polarity"). In this case, the polarity would be between socialization and personalization, and viewing

leadership transitions as constantly "becoming" (see Chia, 1996). A becoming ontology is expressed by Dale (2014) in his often-used Heraclitus quote "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man". Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien's (2012) distinction between positivist approaches with a monologic perspective and constructivist approaches with a dialogical perspective is echoed by Jamil (2015). He points out that leadership theories based on paradigms with a dualistic ontology, positivist epistemology, and a competency-based approach oversimplify the complex nature of leadership transitions. The paradigm that Dale's framework is based on can, therefore, be seen as based on a relational ontology, constructivist epistemology with a dualistic perspective, and a practice-based approach. Indeed, this paradigm is reflected in Dale's statements that leadership in practice is leadership in context and that he views leadership transitions as practice.

Who: HR and HR's Role

Dale (2014) did not clearly distinguish the roles and responsibilities related to leadership transitions. According to Ciampa and Dotlich (2015), the role of HR in leadership transitions is to coordinate the leadership transition process and be an internal advisor. Van de Ven et al. (1976) define coordination as integrating different elements of an organization to fulfil a set of collective interdependent tasks, which in this case is leadership transitions. According to Scott and Davis (2016), elements of an organization include its environment, strategy and goals, work/technology, formal organization, people, and informal organization. These are the elements HR is supposed to integrate to fulfil the practices outlined in this chapter.

In personal communication with Dale, we have developed a framework of the roles or people element in a leadership transition, as displayed in Figure 2:
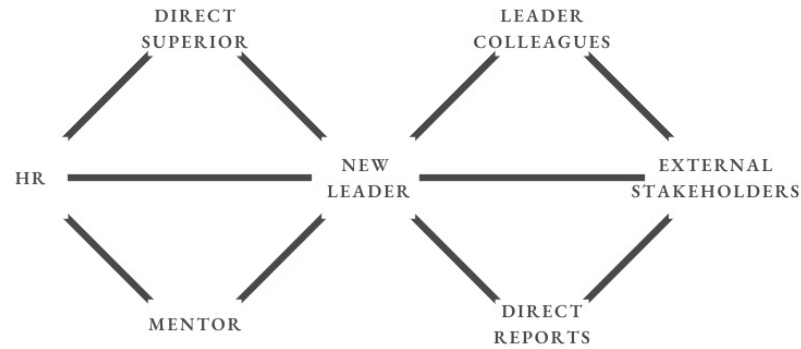
Figure 2. Framework the of Roles in a Leadership Transition. Copyright 2022 by F. Dale & T. N. Lundh.

The framework shows the key stakeholders in a leadership transition and their interdependencies. As can be seen, new leaders have numerous stakeholders that they need to coordinate with during a leadership transition to fulfil the practices. HR primarily works directly with the new leader, their direct superior, and their mentor, but also needs to coordinate the other interdependencies involved in the leadership transition.

HR is described in various ways in the literature (Dowling et al., 2017; Egerdal, 2017; Henle, 2007; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2016; Mathis et al., 2015; Storey et al., 2008), however, at its core it is about organizational practices aimed at covering individual and organizational needs using human resources. These practices are often divided into areas of practice such as offboarding, recruitment, onboarding, training and development, rewards and recognition, salary, performance management, and more (Johannessen & Sætersdal, 2018). When these practices are tied together in a strategic manner, the practice is considered strategic HR management. Coordinating HR internally can, thereby, the considered to influence coordinating leadership transitions.

How HR should be departmentalized to provide value to business is referred to as HR operating model. According to Theotokas and Kapantais (2017) and Keegan et al. (2018), there are several ways for the HR-function to structure its department, however, Ulrich's (1997) three-legged stool model is one of the most prevalent. Ulrich's model has in many ways been considered a benchmark for HR across sectors and involves organizing HR into three functional divisions: (1) a strategic business partner or HR business partner (HRBP) unit, (2) a specialist services or center of excellence/expertise (CoE), and (3) a group

shared/business services (GBS) function (Keegan et al., 2018). Ulrich's model is often illustrated such as in Figure 3:

Figure 3. Ulrich's HR Operating Model. Adapted from *CFO? CIO? The world needs a CHRO! The future of HR: the Chief HR Officer as strategic partner*, by A. van der Laan & S. de Leeuw RE, 2018, Compact (https://www.compact.nl/articles/cfo-cio-the-world-needs-a-chro/). Copyright 2018 by Compact.

The HRBP function is responsible for supporting senior business leaders within their business area (BA) or geographical area, with an emphasis on organizational-level considerations such as sick-leave trends, strategic workforce planning and future competence needs, and culture amongst other things.

The CoE function varies. Ulrich's (1997) model sets this function up as subject matter experts that provide expert services on core areas for HR such as performance and development, learning, and compensation. In practice, however, some organizations have this function take a more strategic role for the HR division itself, keeping an eye on trends and the market situation and using their insight and expertise to shape and govern strategic HR processes globally across business areas to ensure efficiency and effectiveness across BAs in the group.

Lastly, the GBS function is responsible for local administrative follow-up, often specialized based on legal, language, and time zone considerations. This relates to more transactive aspects of HR practice areas such as compensation and benefits, recruitment and onboarding, interaction with unions, and performance and development. Meaning they perform payroll, interviews, system user support, active candidate sourcing, etc. and may be delivered from processing hubs or outsourced to third party providers.

Keegan et al. (2018) describe that the aim of this prescriptive model is to organize the HR function in a way enables HR to respond to contextual needs toward the BAs through the HRBPs, ensure quality and innovation through the CoEs, and deliver on operational excellence regarding operational and administrative tasks through the GBSs. However, the authors point out that in practice it is not always clear which department is responsible for what activities, and that splitting strategic HR from operational execution may weaken HRs strategic value. They therefore argue for a better understanding of HR tensions and paradoxes to provide novel insights into HR in practice. Part of these tensions and paradoxes is the gap between HR theory and practice, which this study seeks to examine as it relates to the gap between Dale's (2014) framework and HR's practice specifically. However, there is not a lot of specific theory on how HR should coordinate leadership transitions, mostly general recommendations.

How: Capabilities

Ciampa and Dotlich (2015) state that the coordination aspect consists of three areas. These areas are ensuring that each phase operates as it should, that the phases fit together as a coherent and strategic whole, and that the practices are sufficiently practical to be implemented smoothly, effectively, and efficiently. However, they do not clarify how to achieve these outcomes. Dale (2014) lists seven pre-requisites for leadership transitions and writes that HR and senior management need to learn about leadership transitions as a subject. He argues in a general sense that capabilities should be developed, which Dale (2015) elaborates on writing that HR should develop templates, tools, checklists, and procedures, initiate internal training for leaders and direct superiors in the specified leadership transition practices, evaluate the phases, establish buddy-programs, and counsel direct superiors as they manage the new leader's transition. An example of such capabilities would be a template for start-up conversations that is structured based on the individual, group, organization, and leadership levels. Also covering topics such as the direct report's description of key tasks and challenges, well-being and personal development including competence development, relation to previous manager and expectations of the new manager, the working climate in the department, division, or team, the climate in the organization as a whole, and any other business (AOB) or topics. Organizational actors subsequently need training related to these resources such as using start-up conversation templates and

conducting the conversations. These trainings should be mandatory, and the capabilities integrated to support the leadership transition process as a whole. Network groups for new leaders should be established, as well as an intensive first-line leader course specifically emphasizing the first 90 days and the key practices included in this period. Direct superiors should own the process and HR should take a supporting role in the sense of enabling direct superiors to manage the practices and actors included in the phases. There should be evaluation points at the three- and six-month marks after a new leader has entered their position.

Dale (2014) points out that, supporting new leaders in their leadership transitions is a lot less about what is done, rather *how* such things as trainings and education are done. However, he describes this mostly in general terms, disagreeing with the practice of leadership gathering and programs, instead advising that leadership transitions be taught as a subject, network groups be established, and leaders are given individual training as and when they need it. In addition to train mentors, he advises internal facilitators that are trained to both coach and guide new leaders. In sum, the way leadership transitions should be coordinated is as structured integrations, not introduction programs. He lists a series of criteria for such structured integrations, namely that at their core that are about mutual knowledge sharing, implemented at all levels of the organization, emphasizes the past, present, and future, lasts a minimum of 12 months, has a process workflow, supports employees during the resignation period, is planned with several activities, is systematized, and is evaluated collectively. To this end, direct superior needs to be held accountable for the transition, as they are critical for ensuring that such a structured integration is established.

Dale's (2014) Framework in Relation to Other Leadership Transition Theory

Dale's (2014) framework differs from other frameworks and approaches in the literature on two main points: its paradigm (as previously described) and its strategic perspective. By strategic perspective I mean that it ties together multiple areas of practice such as offboarding, recruitment, onboarding, leader and leadership development, performance management, and so on. Tying together these areas of practice allows for a strategic connection to emerge across the phases and practices, thereby, clarifying what HR is responsible to coordinate for.

Dotlich (2017) points out that the consequences of individual transitions for both the person and the system are often seen as the individual's responsibility

to manage in literature related to leadership transitions. Dale's (2014) framework captures these consequences in the polarity of socialization and personalization. A large part of the literature, however, has been focused on personal strategies and helping transitioning leaders, often through coaching and with an emphasis on the first 90 or 100 days (e.g., Bradt et al., 2016; Broe, 2012; Ciampa & Watkins, 1999; Citrin & Neff, 2005; Devine & Nieuwstraten, 2021; Ellingsen, 2016; Elsner & Farrands, 2012; Hill, 1992; Sarros & Sarros, 2007; Terblanche et al., 2018; Valencia-Raymundo & De Guzman, 2018; Watkins, 2013; Wheeler, 2010; Yi et al., 2020). Dale's dialogic and strategic perspective, on the other hand, helps highlight organizational strategies beyond one-sided socialization and new leader assimilation initiatives (e.g., see Manderscheid, 2008; Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008). Both in terms of the phases aspect of tying all the practices together in a coordinated manner and regarding the process aspect as the balance between socialization and personalization. To illustrate how these perspectives tie together, I will use Dale's descriptions of start-up conversations to show how this single practice is tied to the preceding practice of town hall, the following practice of start-up seminars, and integrated in a strategic manner in the 90-day plan.

As described previously, the goal of the onboarding phase is for new leaders to establish themselves in their new job through clarifying expectations, building trust and relations, understanding the current situation, evaluating, and (re)orienting. The 90-day plan is a tool to coordinate practices towards this purpose and should be used as a discussion tool during recruitment and made concrete during the preboarding phase. Town hall, or a manager's first personnel meeting at lower leadership levels, is one of the first practices typically included in such a plan. According to Dale (2014), new leaders should answer two questions that are on the minds of their new direct reports, "Who are you?" and "what are you going to do?" at the town hall or first personnel meeting.

Start-up conversations are a continuation of the town hall and has the purpose of getting to know the direct reports on a deeper level, mapping expectations, and making sense of the organization and its context. Start-up conversations are conducted in a quite deliberate manner with all direct reports and has parallels to semi-structured interviews. The structure is based on the individual, group, organization, and leadership levels, and can cover topics such as: description of key tasks and challenges, well-being and personal development

including competence development, relation to previous manager and expectations of the new manager, the working climate in the department, division, or team, the climate in the organization as a whole, and any other business (AOB) or topics. Start-up conversations, therefore, typically last one and a half to two hours in order to properly address the polarities of socialization and personalization on an individual level and facilitate the formation of a psychological contract that feels balanced. The data from these conversations is then analyzed and addressed in a following start-up seminar within the first two weeks.

This seminar is supposed to last 2-3 days, take place at an external resort, and should help the team get to know each other even better, clarify roles, framework conditions, rules, and directions for the team, evaluate team meetings and current status in terms of structure and culture, discuss the most important findings from the start-up meetings, agree on what is and is not working within the team, and craft an action plan for the team. Thereby, addressing the polarities of socialization and personalization on a team level. Before the seminar, the seminar's purpose should be introduced, at the end a time should be set for a follow-up seminar and the start-up seminar should be evaluated against the purpose set at the introduction.

Lack of Empirical Investigations into Leadership Transitions as a Whole

There is reason to expect a great divide between theory and practice regarding leadership transitions (Storey et al., 2008). Most research has emphasized individual actors (e.g., first 100-day strategies), phases in isolation (e.g., recruitment or onboarding), or leadership transitions without a lens of polarity (e.g., socialization detached from personalization). This justifies a scientific inquiry into an expected gap between Dale's (2014) framework and how HR coordinates leadership transitions in practice due to the framework's strengths of having a practice-based paradigm with a dialogic and strategic perspective.

Yet, empirical contributions to Dale's (2014) framework have mainly been student theses about how new leaders experience leadership transitions (Jakobsen & Selieseth, 2016; Sando & Agerbo, 2019), a municipality's documents on onboarding new leaders (Røysland-Egebø, 2020), and the handover process between leaders (Lysko, 2018). The conclusions from these studies in a Norwegian context show that how phases of leadership transitions are coordinated

varies greatly, leaders experience transitions as stressful, chaotic, and being left to sink or swim, and the practices are somewhat random and unstructured. Lyberg and Lier (2017) have also conducted a phenomenological study interviewing HR professionals in six small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) about how the learning aspect of leadership transitions for new middle managers is coordinated based on Haaland and Dale's (2005) learning areas for new first-time managers. Their thesis also concluded that onboarding programs are coordinated in a varied manner.

While it makes sense to narrow the scope of a student thesis to a(n) phase, practice, or actor due to time and resource constraints, I would argue that this does not fully utilize the strength of Dale's (2014) framework compared to other leadership transition theory. To keep the strengths of Dale's framework while staying within the limited time and resources of a master thesis, the scope of this study was refined to testing Dale's framework against HR's practice.

Summary

This thesis used Dale's (2014) definition of leadership transitions which conceptualizes leadership transitions as practice and integrates the practices in terms of the time, phases, and processes relating to one leader being replaced by another for a minimum of one year. Ciampa and Dotlich (2015) have argued that HR's role is to coordinate leadership transition practices and act as an internal advisor. Coordination is defined by Van de Ven et al. (1976) as integrating different elements of an organization to fulfil a set of collective interdependent tasks, which in this case is the practice of leadership transitions. Scott and Davis (2016) describe that the elements of an organization include its environment, strategy and goals, work/technology, formal organization, people, and informal organization. These are the elements HR is responsible for coordinating to fulfil Dale's prescribed leadership transition practices as outlined in this chapter.

This study seeks to test Dale's (2014; 2015) framework against HR participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated in practice. To guide this exploration, the objectives of the study are to compare and contrast the practices included in the various phases of a leadership transition (what), the roles in a leadership transition (who), and the templates, tools, checklists, and so on that can be used to coordinate to fulfil these practices (how). In the next

chapter, I will cover the scientific method I used to compare and contrast these practices, roles, and capabilities.

Method

Introduction

To answer the research questions, I conducted a deductive qualitative research project with the aim of analytic generalization to the theoretical context of leadership transitions as outlined in the previous chapter. Specifically, the aim was to examine how expected patterns of relationships from Dale's (2014) framework fit the patterns in participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated. This aim was operationalized by three objectives: to compare and contrast leadership transition (1) practices, (2) roles, and (3) capabilities. In this chapter, I will outline the comparative multiple-case study design, maximum variation case selection, and semi-structured interviews used to collect the data, as well as Tjora's (2017) stepwise-deductive-inductive (SDI) approach used to analyze the data.

Research Strategy and Design

As the research questions indicate, this study is primarily concerned with process rather than statistical variance of inputs and outputs. This study, therefore, adopted a deductive qualitative approach (Gilgun, 2015; Pearse, 2019) like that of Denis et al. (2000). Dale's (2014) framework, thereby, served as a source of hypotheses and sensitizing concepts to frame the exploratory process and guide data collection of this study. A comparative multiple-case study (Bell et al., 2018) was deemed most appropriate to compare differences, similarities, and patterns in HR participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated varies across the cases. This variation served as a basis for theoretical reflections to produce knowledge and improve theory building. Yin (2018) describes this as analytic generalization, meaning that findings from comparing multiple meaningfully contrasting cases were used as evidence to support, refine, contest, and elaborate on Dale's framework (Schwandt, 2015).

Selection

Case Selection Method

According to Bell et al. (2018), sampling in qualitative research revolves around purposive sampling, which is described as a non-probability form of sampling where the goal is to strategically sample cases or contexts that are relevant to the research question. Yin (2018), however, argues that rather than viewing cases as samples, cases should be considered opportunities to shed

empirical light on theoretical concepts. Yin, therefore, advises using the term selection rather than sample to avoid misleading readers into thinking that the selected the cases came from a population of similar cases. For this reason, I will use the term selection rather than sample going forward. Yin also argues that cases should be selected based on a replication logic, exploring patterns of difference and similarity emerging from analyzing each case separately. Yin (2010) elaborates on this logic, describing it as a two-step process. The two-step process first involves making a conceptual claim showing how findings from the case study changes the theoretical context, then applying the same theory to other similar cases. As mentioned in the introduction, the working hypothesis that served as the initial conceptual claim was that there is a gap between Dale's (2014) framework and practice. Cases were, therefore, not selected for their similarity, rather for their potential to add informational richness to our overall understanding by challenging, replicating, or countering Dale's framework.

For the selected cases to meaningfully contrast, I used maximum variation selection within a Norwegian context. As described in the introduction, a Norwegian context was deemed appropriate because it holds potential for meaningful comparison of the practices, roles, and capabilities prescribed by Dale (2014; 2015). In other contexts, patterns of similarity or difference may exist for other reasons than a gap between theory and practice. According to Dale, organizations that are smaller than 250 employees might have too few employees to have a resourceful HR department, had a leadership transition, or established practices regarding leadership transitions. To further refine the scope of this thesis, I excluded cases that had less than 500 employees. However, just because an organization has more than 500 employees, does not necessarily mean it has had a leadership transition. According to Hill et al. (2018), most organizations change their leaders every 5 years, and organizations that last longer carefully manage their leadership transitions, in some cases changing senior leaders after 10 years. Companies that had operated for less than 10 years were, therefore, also excluded in favor of emphasizing companies with more carefully managed leadership transitions. I also focused the study on private companies since public organizations might have differences or similarities with private companies regarding leadership transition practices that are not related to a gap between theory and practice. Using Proff Forvalt (https://forvalt.no/), I identified 329

companies in Norway with more than 500 employees that had operated for more than 10 years. Within this comparable set of meaningfully contrasting cases, I used maximum variation selection.

Maximum variation selection attempts to get at the core or central dimensions of participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated in practice through common patterns across large variations. This would allow me to understand the uniqueness of each HR participants' description in the cases studied through high-quality detailed descriptions of each case relative to what a survey would provide, while also finding common themes or patterns across the cases emerging from heterogeneity relative to what a single-case study would provide. Since I wanted maximum variation within the defined scope of 329 cases, I aimed to select 15 companies that were varied in size beyond 500 employees and longevity beyond 10 years. According to Yin (2018), the number of cases to select is not based on sampling logic, rather discretionary judgement. I aimed to select 15 cases because Tjora (2017) states that conducting 10-15 interviews is a normal range for what a master thesis can conduct given its time and resource constraints. The reason for choosing maximum variation along the dimensions of size and longevity was that I expected that larger companies that had been operating for a longer time would have seen more leadership transitions and, therefore, was expected to be more used to handling leadership transitions.

Participants

I expected that the HR professionals would be able to say something how their organization coordinates leadership transitions because HR are responsible for the coordination. HR's descriptions would then serve as an empirical basis for inferring theoretical generalizations about how leadership transitions are coordinated. The tasks of HR professionals in large companies tend to vary depending on how their HR department is organized as covered the previous chapter. I sought to primarily interview HR process-owners part of CoE and HR directors. This was because they hold key insight into how their organization coordinates leadership transitions and were considered to hold the significant potential to contribute relevant data to answer the research question.

Of the 36 companies I contacted, 13 agreed to participate. Of these 13, one never responded after the initial agreement, and one did not sign the consent form.

This left the final total number of participants at 11. Their details are outlined in
Table 1:

#	Size	Longevity	Role of representative	Areas of responsibility
1	1300	30+	HR-Advisor	Overall HR and HR subject matter, improving processes and following up with leaders
2	31000	100+	People Resourcing Process Specialist	Process responsible for Employer Branding, Recruitment, Onboarding, and Exit
3	16000	35+	HR-Director	Everything that has to do with HR in the organization in Norway
4	28000	25+	HR-Director	Ensuring that the organization and people are ready for the future. Organizational development, leadership and followership, compliance with laws and regulations, salary and pension, policies and guidelines, development of people
5	33585	100+	Recruitment-Leader	Subject matter responsibility, main responsibility for all recruitment in the entire organization. Responsible for ensuring that HR managers, HR business partners, and HR advisors conduct recruitment processes in their business areas.
6	8000	150+	EVP - Chief People & Corporate Affairs	Public Outreach, Sustainability, Communication, HR
7	664	15+	EVP People and Organization	All HR work in the company and the development. That the HR-strategy matches the development strategy.
8	80000	10+	People Lead	Country responsibility
9	9151	200+	Leader for recruitment and onboarding section	Process responsibility for recruitment and onboarding, including routines, process descriptions, quality system, and personnel and result responsibility
10	2300	100+	VP HR	HR-responsibility for the division in the business unit.
11	1000	25+	VP HR	Chief responsibility for HR in the business unit.

Table 1. Overview of informants.

Since I based the number of employees off the total number of employees
in the company worldwide, the number of employees of in the companies of
Participants 3, 4, 5, and 8 are inflated. Participants 1, 2, 8, and 11 were sourced
through my network. Because of this, companies 8 and 11 are not strictly
Norwegian companies, rather subsidiaries of foreign multinational companies.
The remaining 7 companies were sourced by contacting the HR professionals
directly based on the list of 329 companies gathered from Proff Forvalt. I either
found the email address of the HR-director directly on their website or guessed
what the email address was and approached them with an email. Bell et al. (2018)
point out that gaining access to managers can be difficult and recommend
requesting interviews in a way that is likely to gain a favorable response. I
followed their advice by sending introductory letters via email enclosing a short

outline of the purpose and nature of the project and how the findings may be of use to the participants.

Data Collection

The Interview Guide

While there are several research methods that could be used to collect data for comparative multiple-case studies, the method I deemed appropriate to collect data was qualitative, semi-structured interviewing. Bell et al. (2018) also point out that, since I conducted a multiple-case study, I would need some structure to ensure comparability across the different cases. The interview guide's structure was based around Dale's (2014) six phases of leadership transitions.

The interview guide (Appendix A) was developed following Tjora's (2017) recommendations. The overall structure was divided into three parts: (1) a warm-up part, (2) a reflective questions part, and (3) a rounding-off part. After being informed of the purpose of the study and the information in the consent form, the participants were asked to state their position and areas of responsibility. Since the organization is the case, the warm-up questions were broad and general related to how their HR department is organized and how they work with leadership transitions to get a general sense of the organizational context. The reflection part was divided into six parts based on Dale's (2014) phases: (1) offboarding, (2) interim, (3) recruitment, (4) preboarding (termination and preparation), (5) onboarding, and (6) follow-up and continuous development. The reason for this was to allow the participant to go in-depth on several parts of leadership transitions while providing data related to the research questions. The phases were deemed the appropriate way to structure this part because it would allow the participant to progress linearly through the leadership transition process, to facilitate expansion and elaboration on the topic. Within each phase, I asked questions related to the research questions of what practices are done, what role HR has in leadership transitions, and leadership transitions are coordinated. Follow-up questions were asked to expand on concepts, seek clarification, push for more information, and steer participants (back) onto more fruitful talking points. During the rounding-off part I asked for final reflections to normalize the situation, thanked the participant, and informed them of the next steps in the process.

The interview guide and the consent form were sent to the participants before the interviews so that the participants were better prepared to discuss, reflect, and express their perceptions of leadership transition practice in their organization. This was deemed appropriate since the topic was relatively comprehensive and–as Bell et al. (2018) point out–it strengthens the dependability of the research. I changed the interview guide after the first two interviews. The reason for this change was that the previous interview guide did not get quickly enough to the point. Specifically, in accordance with the research questions, I would first ask the participants to describe what happens during the phase that was in question, then what HR's role was, and then–when the answers to the previous two questions were established–I would ask how HR performs their coordinative role in practice. Asking in this order was done to address the objectives of comparing the practices, roles, and capabilities. This proved challenging, because Dale's (2014) prescribed practiced would not necessarily come to mind for the participants or be easily described and, thereby, led to some meandering that did not yield information directly answering the research questions. This can be seen as an indication of a more substantial gap between Dale's framework and practice than initially expected. Since it might be the case that the ways in which leadership transitions are coordinated simply did not come to mind during the interview, I decided to slightly adjust the interview guide to be more leading. While keeping the structure and order of addressing the research objectives, the second version (Appendix A) went directly to practices included in Dale's framework and asked how HR coordinates to fulfil these concrete practices. For example, I would directly ask: "do you do handover?" and "do you have a procedure, checklist, template, etc. for handover?". This way I got information about the practice of handover, how the capabilities were developed and used, and any alternative ways of doing handover. Although the second version can be critiqued for being more leading, it was deemed appropriate considering the deductive nature of the study and it produced more relevant data to help address the research questions and fulfil the objectives of comparing and contrasting the practices, roles, and capabilities.

Additionally, since I have worked in the HR departments in the companies of Participant 2 and 11, I had more in-depth insight into the context of these two organizations and made some observations that were of relevance to the findings.

The Interviews

I planned to conduct all the interviews digitally using Microsoft Teams. The reasons for this were that I expected getting in-person meetings would be difficult, both due to the high-level positions some of the informants are in and due to the Covid-19 situation. In addition to lowering the threshold for participation, I also wanted to reduce the variation in the interview context. However, five of the eleven interviews were conducted in person and the remaining six were conducted via Teams or Google Hangouts. The in-person interviews were on suggestion by the participants, and I took them up on the offer because in-person interviews created a more personal dynamic.

The interviews were be recorded using my Samsung S8, transcribed by me, and the recordings deleted after confirming with my thesis supervisor. The interviews ranged from 38 to 63 minutes and all except one interview (Participant 8) was conducted in Norwegian. The transcription was conducted by first using Word's text-to-speech function, then reviewing, correcting, and anonymizing the text line-by-line. Due to the differences in verbal and written language, in some cases I removed filler words or rephrased sentences that showed strong signs of orality and/or pauses where the participant was thinking. The data collection was conducted over a 3-month period from the first week of February to the first week of May in 2022. I asked for documents relating to start-up plans, start-up conversations, and procedures. Of the 7 participants I asked to send start-up plans and/or templates for start-up conversations, 2 sent me start up-plans and 1 sent me more elaborate documentation such as procedures and templates. I also had insight into the systems, procedures, and templates of two additional organizations since I have worked in their HR departments.

Data Analysis

Bell et al. (2018) outline two strategies for qualitative data analysis: thematic analysis and grounded theory (GT). The authors state that thematic analysis lacks clearly specified procedures and Tjora (2017) argues that Glaser and Strauss' (1967) GT process assumes a wide timeframe. In the interest of being transparent and concrete with my procedure and realistic in terms of practical considerations with regards to time and resource constraints, I opted for Tjora's (2017) more linear variation of GT called the SDI approach. This means that the data-analysis strategy of this research project included the following inductive

steps: (1) generation of empirical data, (2) data processing, (3) coding, (4) sorting codes, (5) developing concepts, (6) discussing concepts, and lastly (7) theory. These inductive steps were complemented by the following deductive tests as iterations: (1) sampling test, (2) data test, (3) code test(s), (4) sorting test, (5) concept test, and (6) theory test. SDI thereby outlines a more linear approach than GT, striving for smaller iterations. The SDI variation on GT was deemed appropriate for this deductive qualitative study based on that GT in its initial formulation opens for deduction (Gilgun, 2021).

Coding

After the data was collected through semi-structured interviews and transcribed as outlined previously, the third step of the data analysis was coding. To code the data, I read the transcribed interviews in Word and generated codes (in-vivo) based on the question "What is the HR professional saying?", not just "what are they talking about?" regarding how leadership transitions are coordinated in their organization. Coding was then complemented by the code test, where I checked if I could have come up with the code before the coding process and whether the code says only what was talked about and not what was said. This was to avoid a priori codes and thematizing the dataset. Passing this test thus indicated that the codes could not have been generated a priori and accurately represented the empirical data. Although the interviews and thus the transcribed material was in Norwegian, the codes were in English. For example, Informant 6 said the following:

> Ja, det er hele *interndokumentasjon-navn* og når du klikker inn på hver mappe her, så får man bare eksempler og maler, og hvorfor vi gjør, hensikten med hvert enkelt steg. Og så står det også noe om at det er obligatorisk eller ikke obligatorisk, så finaleintervjuet er ikke obligatorisk, hvorfor ikke det, det er bestefar eller bestemor prinsipp, det vil si at man trekker inn en person som ikke har vært i prosessen tidligere, for å være med i et intervju.

This was turned into the code "For each step, there is a folder with examples, templates, the purpose of each step, whether it is mandatory or not", which answers the research question of how leadership transitions are coordinated in practice. The total amount of codes was 363 across the 11 interviews. For data

credibility purposes, the transcribed and coded data were sent to respective participants for review.

Code Sorting and Concept Development

Once the codes were validated by participants, the next step was to sort the code-structured empirical data. At this step I used Dale's (2014) six phases as a basis for sorting the 363 codes. This allowed me to compare and contrast statements from participants related to practices, roles, and capabilities across cases and phases. This resulted in 16 categories that highlighted key cross-case similarities and differences in participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated in relation to Dale's framework.

Once the codes were sorted, I moved onto the developing-concepts step where I drew inspiration from theory. Since using Dale's (2014) phases as themes involved a lot of overlap, I developed four themes that highlighted key similarities and differences in HR participants' descriptions across phases. This helped highlight participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated as a strategic whole, rather than phases in isolation with a lot of overlapping data. The 16 previous categories were then re-organized around these four themes and the codes re-sorted into 13 new categories. These themes and categories are presented in the findings chapter.

Lastly, I discussed the themes and categories from the findings in relation the research question using Dale's (2014) framework and organizational theory as such. The result of this step is presented in the discussion chapter.

Data Quality

Since this is a qualitative research project with constructivist and interpretivist philosophical assumptions, Bell et al. (2018) describe that the research quality of criteria reliability and validity ought to be adapted. The authors suggest trustworthiness and authenticity as primary criteria for establishing and assessing quality of non-positivist qualitative research. Trustworthiness is made up of four sub-criteria, the first being credibility which parallels internal validity and concerns whether I have understood the organization's leadership transition practice correctly and may be established through good research practice, respondent validation, and/or triangulation. Since I have opted to only interview one HR professional per company, the lack of triangulation is arguably a threat to the credibility of the data. Before I started data collection, I considered obtaining

business documents regarding leadership transitions are coordinated in practice. I did not commit to a document analysis because I expected it to be both unreliable to get a hold of and possibly be experienced as obtrusive. This was because not all organizations have such documents or be willing to share them since they might confidential. For example, not all companies have an offboarding plan or are willing to share start-up/90-day plans. Considering that I asked 7 organizations and received documents from 3, I would argue that my initial expectation was not unsubstantiated. To weigh up for lack of triangulation, I decided to send participants the interview guide beforehand so they could be better prepared to provide as accurate accounts as possible. I also invited participants to review the transcribed and coded interview before I moved on to code sorting and developing concepts. This gave the participants the opportunity to correct or elaborate on any accounts I might have misunderstood, while not threatening the scientific legitimacy as they did not influence the academic part of the analysis. In retrospect the time required of informants to both prepare for interviews and review codes proved to be too demanding. Only two reviewed the interview beforehand and feedback during interviews indicated that the informants had no need (or time) to review transcribed interviews and codes. Since no triangulation was done and respondent validation was unreliable, then credibility is best assessed based on my research practice, which I have outlined in this chapter.

The second criterion is transferability, which parallels external validity and concerns whether my findings are relevant for other contexts. While I am not seeking as thick descriptions as I would if I did a more in-depth analysis of fewer cases but rather analytic generalization, this relates to the developing concepts and theories parts of my data analysis and is covered in the discussion chapter.

The third criterion is dependability, which parallels reliability and concerns whether I have been able to give an accurate record of all the phases and steps taken during the research process so that peers have the option of auditing my research. Therefore, I have given a detailed account of the research process, while trying to be concise. Amongst other things, this included providing reasons for the selecting a comparative multiple-case design, semi-structed interviews, and the SDI approach.

The fourth criterion is confirmability, which parallels objectivity and concerns whether I have acted in good faith with a factual basis and not let

personal motives bias the research and findings. I wrote this thesis alone which is a threat to the confirmability of the research. At the same time, due to resource constraints, I was not able to use professional transcription services or peer-coding review to increase credibility. Lastly, Bell et al. (2018) describe that authenticity concerns fairly representing different viewpoints within a social setting, which I contend that I did.

Reflexivity Statement

I recognize that my personal implicit assumptions and idiosyncrasies effect this study (Bell et al., 2018). For this reason, I sought to be aware of and acknowledge that my role as a researcher is part of the (co-)construction of knowledge and that there is an interpersonal relationship that occurs with participants as a result of data collection. As a student, I may have unduly influenced the way the participants responded. For example, participants may have over-reported the scope of how they coordinate leadership transitions. It is a possibility either because participants wanted to be helpful to me as a student by providing data or because they did not want to appear to be worse than other organizations they would be compared to.

To address this possibility, I sought to have a non-judgmental demeanor and reassured participants that there were no right or wrong answers, just bases for anonymous comparison. I also adjusted my language to use the participants' language, to indicate that I was following along with what they were saying if they were using business jargon or abbreviations such as XA (one-over manager) or TA (talent acquisition). Lastly, since I have limited personal experience as a leader or HR professional with leadership transitions, my understanding of the topic was primarily theoretical. On the one hand, my lack of practical experience challenged my sensitivity regarding practice. On the other hand, my theoretical perspective could be more sensitive to themes that help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Ethical Considerations

Diener and Crandall (1978, as cited in Bell et al., 2018) outline four ethical principles associated with research projects: (1) avoidance of harm, (2) obtaining informed consent, (3) protection of privacy, and (4) preventing deception. All research for this study was conducted according to these ethical principles, guidelines provided by NSD, and in compliance with GDPR. Each participant was

given an informed consent form and informed that they may retract their consent at any time. The transcribed and coded interviews were kept separate from a physical identity code to partition de-identified data from identity-only data and strengthen security. Participants and organizations were anonymized so that they cannot be recognized in the final thesis.

Findings

In this chapter, I will present and describe the findings of the study. As described in the previous chapter, the research questions were addressed by structuring the interview guide following Dale's (2014) phases of a leadership transition and asking about practices, roles, and capabilities. Four key themes emerged from the analysis of the 363 codes: (1) approaches to coordinating leadership transitions varied greatly, (2) coordination efforts depend on circumstance, (3) coordination efforts lacked balance, and (4) coordination efforts were largely focused on talent. These themes help highlight similarities and differences in the participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated.

Approaches to Coordinating Leadership Transitions Varied Greatly

The first key theme identified in the analysis, was that leadership transitions were described to be coordinated in a varied manner across cases. In Appendix B I have provided an overview over the practices outlined by Dale (2014) in relation to the descriptions of the participants in this study. The first column shows overlapping practices, meaning practices that Dale outlines and that participants report doing. The second column outlines practices outlined by Dale that participants do not report doing. Lastly, the third column outlines practices described by participants that Dale has not included. This overview highlights the gaps in practice between Dale's framework and the practice described by participants in terms of what practices are done.

Despite several overlapping practices, the more central aspect is *how* these practices are done and differences at a more strategic level. The purpose of including the overview in Appendix B is to cover the numerous gaps between Dale's (2014) framework and HR's described practice in a concise manner, so that I can focus on the more strategic, overarching, and meaningful gaps in the text.

To illustrate the variance in participants' responses and, thereby the gap between Dale's (2014) framework and HR's described practice, I will present the findings in this theme in four categories: (1) opposite developments in approaches to coordinating leadership transitions, (2) use of external recruitment agencies, (3) perspectives on the practice of handover, and (4) approaches to learning and development.

Opposite Transitions

The cases of Participants 1 and 6 were described to have developed or transitioned their approach to coordinating leadership transitions in opposite directions. Participant 6 described that their direct superiors had previously handled leadership transitions themselves and often used external recruitment agencies. Now, however, HR was in the process of building a larger recruitment muscle, becoming more strategic, and taking more space "HR's role and responsibility considerably changed [...] [direct superiors] used external recruitment agencies or did a lot themselves [...] now our HR-muscle, this talent acquisition (TA) team, [...] does a larger part of the job [...] and is taking a larger space in the process" (Participant 6, own translation).

Participant 1, who is familiar with the Dale (2014) framework and the author, described a development in the opposite direction "We used to have a recruitment manager previously [...] and was more involved in recruiting general managers [...] but we quit doing that [...] and developed a framework that works and then HR pulls a little out of that and lets regional director work with the concrete processes" (Participant 1, own translation). Participant 1 described that, rather than having a dedicated HR recruitment resource, HR initiated quality improvement projects to improve overall framework, procedures, and templates. Thereby, enabling direct superiors to fulfil the HR responsibilities of their job for themselves.

This quality improvement project was put together by HR, who was responsible for the project and piloted procedures, process descriptions, and templates for all phases of leadership transitions: "Then HR works with, contributes with a subject matter perspective [...] tests and pilots before establishing it as practice [...] Yes, all procedures are created and developed in the same manner" (Participant 1, own translation). Examples of a procedure for the leadership transition, template for start-up plan, counselling overview for new leaders, and template for evaluation of leadership transitions are attached in Appendix C. Several methods, procedures, and templates were tested based on HR's subject matter authority to find the right fit for their organization over the course of 4-5 years. This also included HR shadowing an entire leadership transition from end-to-end, giving feedback to direct superior, discussing what works, and creating a structure "where you shadow a leadership transition [...] that

is you observe and give feedback, especially to, discuss with regional director and report back to my department how it worked" (Participant 1, own translation).

Both Participants 1 and 6 described their developments as going towards being more strategic. For Participant 6 this entailed HR doing more of the work, for Participant 1 this entailed HR improving the procedures and templates to be user friendly for regional directors while also being quality assured by HR's subject matter expertise. Another variation is seen in the use of external recruitment agencies.

External Recruitment Agencies

In this category I will present differences related to using external recruitment agencies as described by the participants. Participant 3, for example, described often using recruitment agencies for leader recruitments: "For managers, we quite often use external recruitments, that is recruitment agencies. There we have different agreements with different recruitment agencies, they are specialists" (Participant 3, own translation). Other participants described that they only use external recruitment agencies for senior, confidential, or special positions, "we are not using a lot of external recruitment, only for very very senior roles, and for confidential recruitment then we work with headhunters" (Participant 8), "often at that level it is often the recruitment company that facilitates it [...] on a shortlist and presents the candidates to me and the CEO" (Participant 4, own translation), "There can be a with such high positions, and then there can be management positions abroad where we use it, [...] We have also used it now in Norway because we notice that there is a tougher labor market" (Participant 10, own translation). "We do not use external recruitment agencies usually, for senior leadership positions we do. At C-level, SVP-level" (Participant 11, own translation).

In contrast to participants that described primarily using agencies for senior levels, Participant 5 described that they only use agencies for lower-level leadership positions "all senior leader recruitment, that is corporate management, director level, all of this we do ourselves and possibly external support for processes that are on lower levels" (Own translation). Explaining that they are very involved in leadership recruitment because "we get such incredible insight, feedback, response from the market on how we are perceived as a company and

how, what external partners, customers, wish to accomplish with us" (Own translation).

Lastly, Participant 9 described using recruitment agencies to a very little extent. Explaining that, "we have a lot of leadership development program and talent program internally, so it is incredibly rare that we have gone externally and brought in a leader. We produce them preferably from within" (Participant 9, own translation). Leadership development and talent programs was another area of contrast between the case studied, which I will cover in the next category.

Learning and Development

Even though several participants described emphasizing leadership programs, gatherings, or inductions, Participant 1 described emphasizing individual tailored counselling and training. Several participants reported having some form of leadership development program "we do have a leadership development program that is about leading yourself, leading the organization, and leading others" (Participant 7, own translation), "we do have a self-developed leader development program. We have, as of now, two different levels [...] it is group assignments they work on, there are very concrete topics" (Participant 4, own translation). Participant 9 described having an onboarding program called "new as a leader" both for new leaders and external leaders consisting of five modules of two days each and covering topics from labor law to the organization and its leadership philosophy. HR keeps statistics and ensures that managers participate, alumni groups are formed after each class, and they run the program three times per year. Participants 2 and 6 described having learning teams devoted to continuously working on developing programs based on needs. These could sit in learning centers and were responsible for all organizational learning. What is not a topic for learning and development, however, is how new leaders conduct the first 90/100-days and activities such as start-up conversations with direct superior or reports. Participant 4 described that they check in the recruitment process whether the candidate has how to take charge in a new leadership position on autopilot or not by asking how the candidate has conducted their leadership mission in the past. Participants generally describe that HR has no role or are not involved in new leaders' start-up conversations with either direct superior or direct reports. These are done by and are up to the new leaders themselves, so the

conversations vary but HR considers them to be "get to know each other" (Participant 7, own translation) type of conversations.

As will be covered in the evaluation category under the theme of focused on talent, Participant 6 described that they have engagement surveys three times per year. These surveys provide leaders with suggestions for development and improvement. In connection with these identified development and improvement areas, the system may suggest courses and trainings:

the system suggests what you should improve as a leader and comes up with tips on how to address the things you want to improve and then you go up, into LinkedIn learning so that you can sit and learn and understand how to work to improve you as a leader based on that, the input from your employees. So, it's quite a digital and cool scheme. (Participant 6, own translation)

Participant 6 also described that they have various learning offerings from a new leader program to LinkedIn learning courses, however, no one will hold your hand. Leaders create their own fortune. Direct superior will encourage new leaders and they have both a mentor program and network groups for leaders to share experience, but no structured onboarding program. Participant 6's description contrasts with the approaches to learning described by Participants 1 and 7.

Participant 7 described that "it is a lot of individual counselling and then there is some courses depending on, so we tailor depending on level of experience the person has" (Participant 7, own translation). Participant 1 went a step further and stated directly that training was not done through gatherings or programs "we have no catch-up heat in the [organization] in any areas, not even HR. So, everyone gets individual, tailored training" (Own translation). An example of a template for individual, tailored training can be found in Appendix C. These trainings are based on competency gaps uncovered in the recruitment and action plans with a package of measures is implemented and adjusted along the way based on continuous structured evaluations between the new general manager, their direct superior, and a counsellor from the competence department "the general manager has an evaluation together with the regional manager and supervisor. We have, all new general managers get a supervisor from the [competence department] who assists and then it is a bit like a triangular, three-

part collaboration" (Participant 1, own translation). Template for overview of counselling for first-time leaders is also attached in Appendix C. Participant 1's individual and tailored approach thereby stands in contrast to the approaches of other participants that place more emphasis on gatherings. Of note, however, Participant 1 still pointed out that they do have semi-annual leadership gatherings in connection with strategic topics, however, these are not used as trainings for new leaders.

Another participant that described similar practices was Participant 8, who offers both 6-month transition coaching for new leaders and has HRBP facilitate a new leader assimilation between the three- and six-month period after a new leader has started. These measures are offered generally to all new leaders in the company.

The last category within the variation theme, is the practice of handover.

Handover and Overlap

While some participants described that HR has no role in handover or that they usually try to arrange an overlap, others described being directly involved with direct superior to manage what is handed over. Participant 2, for example, described "No we do not support them in this. In a handover." (Own translation), explaining that this was the responsibility of line managers. Participant 6 described the same, "Not standardized, varying practice I think, but that is mostly leaders themselves that take that responsibility and not HR" (Own translation). Participant 10, on the other hand, described that they strive for a 6-month overlap and Participant 5 also described having quite a large focus on handover, stating that "there's a lot of focus on handover, that point, how is everything transferred of competence, experience, then HR is in and ensures it, [...] but it's a lot of one-on-one conversations, where you just are watchful and follow up" (Participant 5, own translation). However, Participant 5 also notes that not everything needs to be handed over and that HR can't dictate what should be handed over because direct superior is important in terms of deciding what information gets handed over. It may be that "[direct superior] does not want person A to train person B in that setting. So, then person XA must have a chat with person B to say what the expectations, that clarification of expectations there is the most important" (Participant 5, own translation). XA here refers to the person one-over A. Participant 3 echoed this argument, stating a need to be a bit careful with

handover "one should be a little careful with, sometimes I think it is wise to let, if we think we have got the right candidate, then it can be wise to let that person shape this themselves" (Own translation). Participant 3 described that new leaders should not learn all of both good and bad habits from the predecessor, so an overlap in the form of a mentor-role is established based on circumstances surrounding the departure, which I will come back to in the next theme.

While both Participants 3 and 5 described that HR are somewhat involved in handover, Participant 1 stated that HR is not directly involved in handover. Rather, due to the improvement project mentioned earlier, "The procedure and template is so intuitive that you do not need direct counselling or help from HR to conduct [handover], they manage this themselves" (Participant 1, own translation). As these quotes show, there is a lot of cross-case difference regarding how participants describe that handover is conducted. However, as Participant 3 noted, participants often described that how leadership transitions are coordinated depend a lot on circumstances. Showing that there is quite a lot of variation not just between cases, as the current theme illustrates, but also from leadership transition to leadership transition. This will be covered in the next theme.

Coordination Efforts Depend on Circumstance

As the descriptions of Participants 3 and 5 regarding handover in the previous theme showed, participants often described that coordinating leadership transitions often depend on circumstances. This is particularly evident in offboarding. The interim and preboarding phases are also used to illustrate this finding, as well as how HR supports leaders.

Offboarding

Offboarding is described as depending on the circumstances to a large extent. While some participants described that HR is not very involved or emphasizes practical matters, others had mapped out circumstances and a strategy for identifying ways forward. As Participant 9 described, "how we support depends on the background circumstances, like what is the reason that the individual leaves the position" (Own translation). Participant 2 described that they had procedures for four potential exit reasons, namely resignation, termination, death, and retirement. Depending on exit-reason "there will be different things that happen, so there are defined processes, what will happen in different scenarios" (Participant 2, own translation). Two participants stated that there are

two types of leadership transitions: "whether it's a replacement or whether it's restructuring the role" (Participant 8).

Participant 8 reported that they have a "buy, burrow, or build strategy" depending on offboarding-circumstances for what to do next:

> We call it the "buy, borrow, or build" strategy, so do we have an internal successor? That would be the build. Do we have the borrow strategy to say ok, perhaps we can offer an assignment, developmental assignment for somebody from another function, from another country, and buy would then be to go externally. (Participant 8)

Participant 8 described that direct superior will contact HR, then they will together map the circumstances and plan how to replace the departing manager. Participant 4 pointed out that the practice of handover is influenced by the exit-circumstances, such as whether the departing manager is available for the new incoming manager for questions and information overlap. However, the participant described that this is not so often the case unless there is a retirement. At the same time, depending on the availability of the new hire, overlap may not always be possible. The need for interim was also closely tied to the circumstances of offboarding.

Interim

The practice of interim was described as depending on circumstances. Participant 2 described that HR no responsibility in this phase since it is line managers responsibility. Other participants also described that the need for an interim was often solved in an informal manner, usually without a mandate "If it is for a longer period, that is 2, 3 months or more, then there must be a discussion with HR about an assessment of responsibilities and salary regarding interim salary-uplift" (Participant 11, own translation). Participant 11 described that, if the need for interim is for a shorter period, such as 14 days or three weeks, then colleagues would cover extra tasks and the interim period would be solved without a mandate.

Another way of solving the need for interim was having a next-in-command or trainee practice "we have a pretty good system in that we have a next-in-command, and we also have in the business units a trainee and we have someone, we have quite many that can step up and be the interim" (Participant 4, own translation), "we have a process where we map successors and there we have

also a column for stand-in" (Participant 10, own translation). In these cases, the interim may primarily be tasked with setting up the work shift and staffing, running the staff meeting once per week, approving work plans and salaries, and other managerial tasks. Participants described that, since interims often have stepped in before in cases such as vacations, interim is likely already familiar with the tasks. In this sense, stand-ins or deputies are often succession candidates, which will be covered in the findings related to the last theme of "large" focus on talent.

Two participants, however, described that interim was used primarily in exceptions, such as when a leader departs immediately such as if a leader dies or goes to a competitor "Because the person is quitting, and going to a competitor, and we cannot have the person walking around here. So, we must terminate everything and shut down PCs" (Participant 5, own translation), "we don't always use interim. [...] because, using an interim has some sides, if I was good enough to be interim why am I not good enough to be the new leader? We are a bit careful with using interims" (Participant 3, own translation). Participant 3 described that, of the 5 000 employees in Norway, they only have 1 interim and indicating a hesitancy towards the use of interim as described by Participants 4 and 10. Since Participant 5 described that this practice should only take place in exceptions, HR's role is to challenge direct superiors to not rush to a decision and check whether the situation at hand really is an exception.

Support

How HR supports managers was also described as depending largely on circumstances and in some cases ad-hoc. For interim leaders, for example, Participant 8 described that "it's more about the day-to-day role or in in many cases, they have a team to lead so we are helping with, you know, whatever decision needs to be made". With interims HR may remove barriers, simplify processes, and explain things to bring them up to speed. With direct superiors they may coach and guide them if they have a new direct reporting manager, for example, encouraging them to use a more directive than supportive style since the person is new, has a lot of questions, and needs input and guidance.

Related to offboarding, Participant 2 described that HR is more involved and holds the manager's hand when there is a termination "it depends on the exit-reason [...] if it is the case of a termination, then it is more on the legal aspects,

that [HR] holds the leader's hand more to ensure that they follow documentation requirements" (Own translation). Furthermore, since legal matters differ from country to country, operating in many countries creates a complexity and a need to coordinate leadership transitions in a decentralized manner. "so that shows the complexity in what we're working with [...] it is complex to understand the complex picture in large companies with many countries that have different laws and regulations and at the same time you cannot detail-manage someone" (Participant 2, own translation). Participant 2 described that they are trying to be forwards leaning and keep HR's support decentralized in the sense that the CoE does not govern the local HR or GBS. Participant 6 described an effort to be more deliberate in exposing new leaders to many people in an informal manner, such as coffee-chats to ensure that new leaders establish contact with many and get a lot of feedback form a wide variety of stakeholders from different perspectives.

Participant 8 described that "we offer transition coaching for, not for everybody but for our senior leaders in that role. [...] also the transition coaching, so where the new leader gets a coach and works with the coach for about six months" and pointed out that how HR supports with coordinating leadership transitions depends on the direct manager: "a lot depends on the hiring manager, and that's what I sometimes miss in the process. So, there is still this likelihood that people fall through the cracks, despite the process." (Participant 8). This is echoed by other participants

> it varies with the team's size, and time [...] it completely depends on, if you are on [business unit], then our personnel managers are responsible for, that is the lowest leadership level responsible for people, can have up to 100 [direct reports]. (Participant 3, own translation)

Participant 10 also described that it

> will vary depending on what type of leadership position it is, what leader it is, some leaders need more follow-up than others, some you now will not do it [...] some will not care about it [...] some are really good at it, others are not. (Participant 10, own translation)

As the participants describe, some managers may have 100 direct reports, some are more skilled than others when it comes to creating a plan for onboarding new leaders, and some done want to or care more than others. Participant 6 described the same regarding the use of case during recruitment "it is a bit from,

depending on, again, the level of the role and how engaged the hiring manager is"
(Own translation). As the participant described, how HR supports depends partly
on the level of the leadership role. Participant 9 also noted that leadership level
was a factor "the higher up you get in the hierarchy, the more leadership support
the line organization gets from People [...] You get your own People-partner that
is responsible for your particular area [...] you get a lot of counselling there
naturally" (Own translation). These People-partners help assess needs for
recruitment and help initiate a recruitment process. Participant 4, however,
described a slightly different perspective

> HR is not the kind of thing that holds people's hand all the time and 'can
> you manage this and can you manage that meeting alone', that is these are
> leaders that have a leadership assignment that runs a huge billion [NOK]
> business, so you like have someone, du have done it before. (Own
> translation)

As the participant described, leaders at more senior levels have experience
and do not need handholding from HR. When asked about whether HR supports
in relation to start-up conversations and other practices during the onboarding
phase, Participant 4 described that their leaders "learn, but on-the-go in a way. It
is not everything that you need to read your way to or get from HR" (Own
translation). Describing that the first period is when leaders have good time to
walk around and chat, participate in kick-offs, and just "tender" and get to know
the organization and its people. In addition, support depends on the level of
leadership, since if you are a leader for the first time, then HR provides a lot of
help both through courses and help upon request from a HR business partner.
Participant 1, however, described support as ad-hoc "I have a lot of ad-hoc follow-
up actually. Where you address things when it is needed because it shows up like
underway and inquiries come to me then about support and assistance" (Own
translation). However, Participant 1 draws a clear line between ad-hoc support and
the systematic and pre-planned learning and development that was covered in the
previous theme. Ad-hoc support or problem-solving in the context of this category
in this theme is not the same as planned training.

This line was more blurry when it came to Participant 7's description of
their integrated approach to supporting a CEO transition "in a company like us,
that has what we call an integrated model, no one is sitting and doing something

alone" (Own translation). The participant described the case of a CEO transition, where HR and the new CEO had set up a cross-functional transition team. Since this relates more to developing successors, I will cover this in the succession planning category in the last theme.

Lack of Balance

The third theme uncovered in the data was a lack of balance between different aspects of leadership transitions. This theme will be illustrated with findings related to three categories: (1) leadership transition training, (2) capabilities, and (3) evaluations.

Leadership Transition Training

Participants described that the topic of leadership transitions is not covered as part of leadership development training or programs. While participants described having courses or training related to phases of leadership transitions, leadership transitions as a strategic whole were not a topic for training or development. When asked, participants responded "[recruitment] and onboarding, well, no not leadership transitions" (Participant 8), "we do not have a specific scheme for [leadership transitions]" (Participant 7, own translation), and "we have, that is varying leader trainings, so I think it is, that is directly or indirectly covered there but we do not have something directly on leadership transitions I would say" (Participant 10, own translation). Showing that leadership transitions was covered in a skewed manner by covering some individual phases separately and disconnected from the whole. Participant 3 stated that the topic of leadership transitions is not critical for them "we have limited time and we have to be critical of what we train them in and think is the most important, and per today the topic of leadership transitions is not something critical for us" (Own translation). The participant described that it might be the case that they train their direct superiors in leadership transitions, then they do not need to change a direct reporting leader until two years later. At which point they will have to repeat the training, so training leaders in leadership transitions provide little value.

Capabilities

While HR has developed a lot of capabilities for some phases such as recruitment, HR has less capabilities related to other phases such as the interim phase and leadership transitions as a strategic whole. These capabilities include systems, procedures, and procedures for evaluation.

From personal observation working in HR for the companies of Participant 2 and 11, I have noted that the HR information system (HRIS) SAP Success Factors (SF) has modules for offboarding, recruitment, onboarding, succession, learning and development, and performance management. Leadership transitions, however, notably does not have its own module or functionality. In these cases, leadership transitions did not have its own procedure or process description either. Illustrating that each phase is emphasized as its own.

Several participants described process descriptions, templates, and other capabilities in relation to specific phases. As Participant 10 described: "we have a very detailed recruitment policy, so that it is something that all leaders must familiarize themselves with" (Own translation). Participant 9 described similar types of capabilities related to recruitment "We have our own SharePoint site for hiring managers where we explain in detail the different steps and what must be in place and, well, some tips and tricks for interview, assessment and basically a training module in recruitment" (Own translation). Participant 5 described and showed me on their computer a more comprehensive recruitment SharePoint folder structure consisting of 15 steps. However, this was only available for HR, where each step had its own folder with examples, templates, the purpose of each step, and whether it is mandatory or not "you can't see all the templates and those things, but you can see the main folder structure [...] so you see methods, templates, there you see 15 steps with start-up conversation, competency profile…" (Participant 5, own translation).

As the analysis of the data shows, participants described prioritizing recruitment to a larger degree than other phases and leadership transitions as a strategic whole. For example, Participant 2 described that, while HR has quite a large role in recruitment, they have no role in the interim phase: "Yes, very large role in specifically recruitment [...] [HR] does not have any role or responsibility in [the interim] phase" (Own translation).

As Participant 11 described "I also do not think we can say that we have a specific system or procedure for evaluation of leadership transitions" (Own translation). Although Participant 11 referred to a lack of systems and procedures for evaluation of leadership transitions, the analysis of the data showed a lack of systems and procedures for leadership transitions itself. This was common for all participants with the mentioned exception of Participant 1 whose procedure and

template for evaluation is attached in Appendix C. To further illustrate the finding that participants' descriptions of leadership transitions indicated a lack of balance, I will elaborate on the topic of evaluation in the next category.

Evaluations

Participants reported using engagement surveys, surveys after phases such as recruitment or offboarding, performance management assessments, and probation evaluation. However, participants described that the process of leadership transitions is not evaluated. When I asked participants how leadership transitions are evaluated, the responses I got were "That we do not do. [...] not systematic, and not the transition as such, but of course leaders are evaluated in the act, and that is two different things" (Participant 7, own translation), "It is not evaluated quantitative. It is evaluated through that the leader of the new leader, the new hire has their goals and development conversations every year, often twice per year" (Participant 4, own translation), "That is a good question. To a lesser degree I would say. Definitely not in a systematic manner [...] but we, that is how successful a leadership transition has been, that we do not evaluate systematically" (Participant 3, own translation), "We do not have any structured evaluation of leadership transitions" (Participant 9, own translation), "We are not very good at evaluating, [...] we do not have any formal evaluation procedure, [...] we have of course a discussion afterwards" (Participant 10, own translation).

As the participants described, the leadership transition process is not itself evaluated. As Participants 4 and 7 pointed out, leaders as individuals are evaluated but that is something different. This focus on individuals is another theme uncovered in the findings, which will be covered in the next theme.

Large Focus on Talent

The second key theme in the findings was that HR has a large focus on talents or individuals rather than the process. This emphasis is shown in the data related to how HR works with: (1) evaluation, (2) learning and development, and (3) succession planning.

Evaluation

As described in the last category of the previous theme, most participants describe that HR does not evaluate the leadership transition process itself, either systematically, formally, or in a structured manner. Evaluation of phases was more common among the participants. While one participant described a survey at

the end of the recruitment process as "Nothing other than a small survey after the recruitment process where we ask for feedback on the process" (Participant 9, own translation), another participant described a more elaborate evaluation of the recruitment phase that included a visual map of the process "a visual process that shows how many internal candidates there were, how many came via only recommendations, networks, [...] to make visible any assessment of inclusion and diversity in the process, and all things in relation to the new leader" (Participant 5, own translation). As Participant 5 described, these evaluations involve a process map, showing how the number of candidates and their characteristics. As the data shows, the phase is evaluated, the focus is on the individuals or talents and their characteristics, not the process and its characteristics. When Participant 6 was asked how they evaluate leadership transitions, the answer was "there we can be a lot better with, in a way, be clear about defining what characterizes success as hire" (Own translation). Again, when asked how leadership transitions are evaluated, the participants answer relates to the individuals.

Yet, some participants stated that there is no evaluation of leaders during the probation period, rather that this is done in connection with regular employee-evaluations or performance management. When asked how leaders are evaluated before the probation period ends, Participants answered "Limited, but we run people-reviews, we run yearly, so we will take that into consideration there [...] but it is captured in our yearly people-review" (Participant 7, own translation), "The probation period also, just thought to take it, it has nothing either [...] Better at evaluating managers at the end of the probationary period, it can quickly be that, 'oh, it's been 6 months, yes, yes, right'" (Participant 5, own translation),

> a discussion that takes place in, actually organized around our performance management system and our bonus system. [...] manager and manager's manager would have a discussion about evaluating onboarding and performance in the first year, as part of normal performance management. So is embedded in the usual processes, not a separate process. It is important to perhaps say that we do not have leadership change evaluation as a separate process in itself. (Participant 11, own translation)

As Participant 11 pointed out, evaluation is embedded in the performance management and bonus systems. Some organizations emphasize employee engagement surveys and performance evaluations "We carry out, I think it is

quarterly, what you can Puls-surveys that take the pulse of the organization, and then you get results at the section and department level" (Participant 9, own translation), "we have an engagement survey 3 times a year, [...] you will find out where you, how you score in relation to other leaders and how, what confidence you have as a leader and so on" (Participant 6, own translation). These surveys can then be used to inform leaders of what areas they can improve and develop. Leaders then have options such as a new leader course, LinkedIn Learning access, and other training sessions as covered in the learning and development category under the theme on variation. However, the participant noted that it is up to the new leader to make use of these capabilities "You can sign up for very many training sessions on various topics [...] you are a bit your own fortune maker, right. There are lots of offers, but you must take the initiative yourself" (Participant 6, own translation). Other participants described that they have more structured probation evaluations "for those who have a trial period, [direct superior] will also receive an email about it, that now it is beginning to approach the end of the trial period, then you must think about these things, these things are important" (Participant 2, own translation). Participant 2 described that 3 emails are sent out over the course of the probation period, with some pre-reads and questions to help direct superior evaluate the new hire.

As these types of evaluations show, the focus is on the talent even when what is evaluated is a phase. If someone performs well, they might be added to a talent pool in relation to succession planning and strategically developed towards critical positions. This will be covered in the next category, but before that, Participant 1 described a slightly different evaluation. This involved a three-part cooperation between new general manager, direct superior, and a counsellor. The template for this evaluation can be found in Appendix C and shows more of a focus on the process, with questions regarding whether the recruitment process felt fair, whether the new hire got the information they needed, and whether the counselling was helpful. Thereby, serving as a contrast to the other descriptions in this category that reflect a focus on talent rather than the process.

Succession Planning

When asked about leadership transitions, the participants would often provide information about succession planning despite this not being a part of Dale's (2014) framework or the interview guide. Participant 7 argued that

leadership transitions start with succession planning "We start already on succession planning, right. That we have a thorough process for and that goes up to the organizational committee in he board once per year" (Own translation). Participant 7 described that they have a pipeline for all critical roles, with candidates that are on the block for many years and providing an example of a leader that retired where they had 2 candidates that were developed for years to prepare them for the role. Participant 7 described that succession planning is the responsibility of HR, but that "the change itself is not something that HR does alone" (Own translation), rather it involved a cross-functional transition team. This team created suggestions for a 100-day plan with hundreds of activities planned out from town hall to training in insider trading and discussed it with the new CEO. This plan was based on input from the perspectives of several specialists working cross-functionally in this transition team to both support and train this new CEO as they took charge in their new position. Furthermore, Participant 4 believed that "the basic thing that must be prerequisites for good leadership transitions is that this is discussed many years before the situation arises. And that's where you always plan, successor planning is also a risk management tool" (Own translation). Participant 4 described that they discuss how long it is until a particular leader resigns or retires, what successors might be likely candidates at that point, and whether anyone is eager to take on an assignment or getting eager to move on. The participant pointed out that, if a senior leader resigns, they are not starting from scratch. Rather 60% of the work is already done and what remains is to execute the procedure with posting the job internally, encouraging candidates, and ensuring gender balance. Leadership transitions should therefore not come as a surprise. Participant 2 described that their employees with high potential are identified through the performance management processes and added to a talent pool "So here business partners have a large role, we from global offer development courses [...] so there are different development courses that are possible" (Participant 2, own translation). While Participant 7 described that they rarely hire externals due to their succession planning, Participant 5 argued that, even though they may have a successor as a favorite, this person still needs to win the position and be challenged by internal and external candidates "it is important that we run a recruitment process on it, so that you must win the position [...] you can have a favorite, but they must always

be challenged by other internal and externals, so you win the position" (Participant 5, own translation). Participant 5 described that it is important to map and manage internal and external expectations. Giving an example that if all team members think that they themselves or an external candidate will get the position, then if someone from the succession planning gets the job it might be experienced as unfair and justify that they start looking for jobs elsewhere. Successors are also used as interim as mentioned in the interim category. These descriptions of succession planning help highlight a focus on talent in the manner HR coordinates leadership transitions.

Talent Acquisition

Participant 7 described that "The purpose of the recruitment is to find the right candidate for the position" (Own translation). This is also reflected in that several participants described having a talent acquisition (TA) or recruitment team "We have hired a lot of good search people from the industry, because I come from there, as I work for myself, as I have also done targeted search, we have picked, hand-picked those we know are out there" (Participant 6, own translation). These typically advertise positions, do targeted search, generate a list of candidates, and help select a candidate based on an overall assessment. This TA team works with strategic hires, recruiting leaders together with hiring manager based on success criteria for the role. Participant 8 adds that their TA team also "they should come up with the latest trends and benchmarks, what other companies do, employer branding strategies. So the talent acquisition colleagues they keep in touch with this new colleague from job posting to the contract signing". HR employees in the TA team may also keep in touch with new hires during preboarding, checking if they need anything or have questions. These TA teams may deal with large volumes of tasks related to recruitment "Our TA team was in dialogue with 50 000 candidates (Participant 6, own translation), therefore, effectively processing al the candidate information was very important. Participant 6 described that they have 100-150 candidates for a particular position, then the information about the new hire needs to be smoothly onboarded in the personnel and contract systems. Standardized contracts are sent out along with Code of Conduct, information about the company, and trainings. In the future they are looking to tailor the information that is sent out depending on what talent-group the new hire belongs to. Giving an example that a technology manager

might get a different onboarding learning journey than an operational leader, describing that HR desires to take a larger role and responsibility during onboarding. As this relates to the first category on opposing developments under the first theme, Participant 6's descriptions regarding this topic are elaborated on there.

Participants also described that HR has quite a broad toolbox for recruitment "We have a broad toolbox, the interview is in a way the main component, interview and reference control. We have cases we use, and we also use type testing, ie there is personality testing, ability testing, language testing where necessary" (Participant 3, own translation). As the description shows, the toolbox consists primarily of methods for testing talent. Furthermore, local HR at times both trains leaders and grooms or challenges leaders on recruitment matters. Examples include challenging direct superiors on the urgency of finding a new hire, whether candidates really need 10 years of experience or a master's degree, and diversity. Lastly, this focus on talent is also seen in how leadership transitions are discussed. Participant 4 described that, when leadership transitions are discussed, it primarily concerns succession and what talents have potential as covered in the previous category within this theme.

Concluding summary

My analysis of the data indicated that approaches to coordinating leadership transitions varied greatly, coordination efforts depend on circumstance, coordination efforts lacked balance, and coordination efforts were largely focused on talent.

The first theme was that leadership transitions were described to be coordinated in a varied manner across cases. To illustrate this variance, case descriptions from Participants 1 and 6 were shown. These cases had developed in opposite directions with respect to their approach to coordinating leadership transitions. The former described that HR takes a more indirect role and the latter describing that HR is more directly involved in leadership transitions. Participants also described varying uses of recruitment agencies. While some reported using them regularly for leaders, others described only using agencies for senior leaders, and one participant reported only using agencies for junior leaders. Participants' approach to learning and development also varied, from an emphasis on gatherings, to two participants emphasizing individual, tailored counseling and

training. The last category related to the theme of variation was that organizations had varying approaches to the practice of handover and overlap. Some stated that HR had no role in the practice, others strove for a 6-month overlap, and others stated that the information overlap needed to be managed.

The second theme was that HR practice depended on circumstances. During offboarding some participants described having mapped different circumstances and others had several strategies to manage various situations. Participants also described handling the interim period differently depending on the length of the need. Lastly, how HR supports leaders depended on various circumstances from level of experience to hierarchical level of leadership.

The third theme had to do with a lack of balance related to how leadership transitions were described to be coordinated. Leadership transitions did not feature on trainings, courses, or programs, rather phases such as recruitment or onboarding did so in isolation. There is also no system module, procedure, or process description specifically for leadership transitions. Again, the capabilities are directed at the phases in isolation. Lastly, leadership transition processes are not evaluated specifically or systematically, rather phases such as recruitment is evaluated, and individuals are evaluated as part of the probation period or performance evaluations.

The last theme highlighted was that how HR coordinates leadership transitions is largely focused on talent. Participants' descriptions of evaluations were again shown to illustrate that, even when a phase is evaluated, the content of analysis is typically the individuals, talent, or people. This focus on talent is also illustrated in the emphasis on succession planning. When leadership transitions or succession is discussed, the topic is typically the talents and high potentials added to talent pools. The last category for this last theme was participants' emphasis on talent acquisition. Showing the extensive resources and capabilities invested in sourcing, screening, and selecting the correct talent.

In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings in relation to the two research questions.

Discussion

In this chapter, I will make sense of and interpret the findings presented in the previous chapter as they relate to the overarching research problem statement. The research aim was to test Dale's (2014; 2015) framework against HR participants' descriptions of existing practice and clarify the extent to which there is a gap between Dale's framework and practice. This research aim was addressed by to comparing and contrasting the descriptions of HR representatives regarding leadership transition practices, roles, and capabilities in their organization. The key findings from the analysis indicated that approaches to coordinating leadership transitions varied greatly, coordination efforts depend on circumstance, coordination efforts lacked balance, and coordination efforts were largely focused on talent. These four themes will be discussed in relation to the two research questions:

1. What are the leadership transition processes of large private companies in Norway like from a human resource perspective?
2. What role does Dale's (2014) leadership transition framework play in human resources' leadership transition processes in large private companies in Norway?

Lastly, I will conclude the discussion by addressing limitations to this study and alternative explanations for the findings.

What Are the Leadership Transition Processes of Large Private Companies in Norway Like from a Human Resource Perspective?

From HR participants' perspective leadership transitions seem to be coordinated in a variety of ways, largely dependent on circumstance, lacking balance, and focused on talent. In this section, I will answer the research question following the four themes uncovered in the analysis.

Approaches to Coordinating Leadership Transitions Varied Greatly

Participants described varying approaches to coordinating leadership transitions. The findings showed HR departments developing in opposite directions, varying use of recruitment agencies, different approaches to learning and development, and various perspectives on the practice of handover. In this section, I will interpret these findings in relation to Dale's (2014) framework and organization science to argue that standardization appears tricky and even daunting from HR' perspective.

Since I selected cases based on maximum variation, organizational elements differed. Variance can be expected due to dependent variables effecting how the organizational elements should be integrated to fulfil Dale's (2014; 2015) prescribed leadership transition practices. However, there should also be some independent variables that organizations can manipulate so that leadership transitions are coordinated in a more standardized manner. The findings from this study aligns with previous studies of leadership transitions in a Norwegian context (Jakobsen & Selieseth, 2016; Lyberg & Lier, 2017; Lysko, 2018; Røysland-Egebø, 2020; Sando & Agerbo, 2019) to indicate that there is no established best practice when it comes to coordinating leadership transitions. Standardization appears challenging.

Dale (2014) argues for structured integrations as something that is applicable to all organizations and all leadership levels. However, only Participants 1 and 7 describe approaches to coordinating leadership transitions that appear to align with Dale's recommended structured integration. For the most part, leadership transitions are not like how Dale prescribes. Indeed, Participant 6 described developing their approach to be more strategic in the opposite direction of Participant 1. However, the participant seemingly did so for good reason, namely that their direct superiors had handled leadership transitions on their own or by using recruitment agencies. For HR to take over the tasks, was a step towards more strategically coordinating leadership transitions. However, this development did not solve the core of the issue according to Dale's framework. That is, new leaders are still not integrated in a structured manner. From the perspective of HR, coordinating leadership transitions does not seem straightforward.

The practice of handover highlights that there is no common established best practice. While Participant 2 described having no role, others described emphasizing handover and overlap. For Participant 3 handover depended a lot on circumstance and Participant 5 described that direct superior is crucial. Several participants echoed that HR cannot dictate how handover should happen, since direct superior needs to have the final word. However, as Lysko (2018) notes, while there is a balance of what information to hand over, whether what is handed over is good or bad largely depends on the eyes of the beholder. The findings from that study were that new leaders prefer to use their own judgement to assess

what information to take in, especially information regarding relationships. This study aligns with Lysko's findings that handover is practiced in varied ways. Additionally, Participant 1 had left the practice of handover to direct superior without much involvement from HR but with the notable difference of having enabled direct superior first. Specifically, providing direct superiors with a template and trained them in the use of both procedure and template, direct superiors use their own discretion and expertise when conducting handover. I would argue that this difference can best be understood in relation to the concept of organizational routines.

From a practice-based perspective, Feldman and Pentland (2003) have reconceptualized organizational routines as a source of flexibility and change. It could be argued that participants' reluctance to dictate how handover should happen indicates a view of standardization and routines as a constraint from HR's perspective. Participant 1's description, however, reflects standardizing the handover practice in a manner that enables direct superiors rather than constraining them. I would argue that this finding related to the practice of handover, calls for a study into whether more HR-practices that can be reconceptualized to provide employees and managers with a source of flexibility and change, rather than being a constraint. For example, participants would often state that they have no role in the start-up conversations of new leaders. I would argue that this is because HR might see their role as formalizing and constraining what happens in these meetings. However, a simple conversation guide would arguably serve as a source of flexibility and change, rather than a constraint. As it stands, what leadership transitions are like from the perspective of HR, appears to involve a worry about enforcing standardization upon line managers. Dale's (2014) framework and reconceptualizing routines as a source of flexibility and change, therefore, hold potential for HR to support managers and employees in more enabling ways.

Regardless, considering these varied approaches, I would argue that it might be experienced as challenging for HR to prioritize where to invest their efforts with regards to leadership transitions. After the recording stopped in one of the interviews for this study, one participant stated that far too many senior HR-professionals in Norway are self-made with no formal education. The participant noted a hopefulness for the next generation of educated HR-professionals to see

what they bring for the future. I echo this sentiment and believe that–based on the findings in this study–challenging established assumptions regarding routines and standardization will likely play a meaningful role in this next generation of HR.

Coordination Efforts Depended on Circumstance

Based on the descriptions of most participants, leadership transitions are perceived as unpredictable or uncertain and complex. They describe that leadership transitions depend on different circumstances. This includes but is not limited to exit-reason of departing manager, length of need for interim, whether it is a restructuring of a role or replacement, access to talent or successors, and whether it is an internal promotion or external hire. Furthermore, some leaders have upwards of a hundred direct reports, some are disinterested in creating onboarding plans for new direct reporting managers, and some have more experience than others. While HR's perspective appears to be to meet the technical complexity of leadership transitions with complexity of HR, I will argue that perhaps complexity on the part of line managers might be a more fruitful pursuit.

According to Scott and Davis (2016), greater technical uncertainty is associated with less formalization and centralization, and that greater technical complexity is associated with greater complexity of either structure or performer. Connecting these theories to Dale (2014), technical uncertainty and complexity are dealt with by seeing the time aspect and planning thereafter. Dale's recommendations can further be understood as advocating for greater complexity on the part of direct superiors so that they can fulfil the leadership transition practices in an informal and decentralized manner. This means providing direct superiors with the resources and training they need to carry out leadership transitions for themselves. This contrasts with what leadership transitions are like for most participants in this study.

Participants place a large emphasis on complexity on the part of HR. Both in terms of departmentalization of the HR department based on Ulrich's (1997) model and with regards to performer complexity in the sense of HR caseworkers. HR professionals are often equipped with a variety of resources and tools from elaborate SharePoint folder structures, test and assessment competence, and "buy, borrow, or build" frameworks for strategic options. Participants would describe having talent acquisition (TA) or recruitment teams, specifically dedicated to the

recruitment phase of leadership transitions. These teams are highly specialized and competent related to practices within one specific phase of one aspect of Dale's (2014) framework. While Scott and Davis (2016) tell us that complexity is associated with leadership transitions being coordinated in an informal and decentralized manner, participants generally describe the opposite to be the case. This is evident in recruitment, where HR holds the hand of direct superiors or taking over tasks such as sourcing and screening candidate while emphasizing testing and assessments. In other words, what leadership transitions is like for HR, is that the complexities of leadership transitions are largely solved by HR professionals attempting to select the correct new leader.

At the same time, Participant 2 described that the HR function itself is decentralized to deal with the complexities of differing circumstances. The statement of this participant needs to be understood in the context of Ulrich's (1997) model, where the CoE department in some applications of Ulrich's model dictate or govern how the GBS department should work. In the case of Participant 2, their CoE function did not have a dictating or governing function, rather a shaping and safeguarding function. Meaning that, when speaking of dealing with complexities in a decentralized manner, the participant referred to local HR being enabled to perform leadership transition practices and making decisions related to hiring such as sourcing and screening, thus not governed by central HR CoE. Meaning that the complexities are not actually dealt with in a decentralized manner, rather through departmentalization in the HR function. Since departmentalization of HR is associated with greater task interdependence, it places higher coordination requirements within the HR department between the CoE, GBS, and HRBP departments (Lawrence & Lorsh, 1967). Within the CoE and GBS functions, HR professionals are often specialized around the areas of practice such as offboarding, recruitment, onboarding, training and development, rewards and recognition, salary, performance management, and more (Johannessen & Sætersdal, 2018). Keegan et al. (2018) state that HR's departmentalization based on Ulrich's (1997) may weaken the strategic value of HR. HR arguably risks organizing as what Scott and Davis (2016) describe as chimney structures, or silos. Where what happens in recruitment is not integrated with what happens in onboarding. What leadership transitions are like for HR, could, therefore, be argued to be that HR struggles to keep up with the increased

coordination demands associated with specializing in this manner in response to complexity.

Arguably, Dale's (2014) framework presents an opportunity to manage these complexities in a straightforward manner. By simply enabling line managers to manage the complexity themselves such as the case with Participant 1. However, this clearly is not always so easy. Specifically, Participant 1 has built these process descriptions, procedures, and templates (Appendix C) over the course of 4-5 years through pilot projects. These served to also train and involve direct managers so that they were enabled to coordinate leadership transitions for themselves. Therefore, HR support is reduced to a small degree of ad-hoc follow-up as and when needed. Simply put, since fires are prevented, not much fire extinguishing is required.

Participant 1's approach contrasts with the approach described by most participants who have not indicated enabling direct superiors to coordinate leadership transitions for themselves. Rather, HR is often directly involved in solving tasks and holding the hand of direct superiors who are described varying largely in terms of level of experience and interest in coordinating leadership transitions. It is, therefore, understandable that participants generally describe that leadership transitions are unpredictable and complex for HR, who then responds to these technical demands with structural and performer complexity on the part of HR. Putting out more fires rather than figuring out why it is burning in the first place: that line managers lack the resources and capabilities to deal with the unpredictability and complexities they are faced with and, therefore, need HR to hold their hand from offboarding to onboarding. While this highlights a need for Dale's (2014) framework in terms of managing these elements in a more straightforward manner.

A notable exception to both Dale's (2014) prescription and Participant 1's practice is Participant 4 who described that leadership transitions do not come as a surprise because they have discussed the topic thoroughly beforehand. Stating that the transition is 60% rigged when it occurs, so the remainder is just the practicalities of following the procedure. This statement will be discussed both in the section on the theme that coordination efforts are largely focused on talent and related to the change / transition distinction in the next research question.

Coordination Efforts Lacked Balance

As the findings showed, leadership transitions were not a topic for trainings, capabilities were dedicated in a disproportionate manner usually towards recruitment while HR had no role in other phases, and evaluation was focused on parts of leadership transitions rather than the leadership transition as a strategic whole. In this section, I will interpret and make sense of these findings as they relate to Dale's (2014) framework and existing literature. I will argue that this lack of balance threatens HR's ability to strategically coordinate leadership transitions.

According to Scott and Davis (2016), since organizations are *systems* of interdependent elements, we will miss the essence of organizing if we focus primarily on one element and exclude the rest. Yet, the findings of this thesis indicate that HR is primarily focused on the people element of organizations. This lack of balance arguably has consequences for what leadership transitions are like from HR's perspective. The different phases of leadership transitions such as recruitment and onboarding leader candidates are parts of the same overarching process (Anderson & Ostroff, 1997), and needs to be understood as a strategic whole (Haaland, 2019). As described in the theory chapter, one of the strengths of Dale's (2014) framework is its strategic perspective.

Dale (2014) argues that leadership transitions are largely about seeing the time and planning thereafter based on the phases to account for the process aspect. For this reason, Dale considers leadership transition training to be a prerequisite for being able to strategically manage leadership transitions. The findings of this study indicate that HR does not share Dale's view on this matter. The topic of leadership transitions is not featured on courses and trainings. Leadership transitions lack its own resources and capabilities such as procedures and system-modules. Leadership transitions are not evaluated. Some participants even consider the topic of leadership transitions as not crucial. In sum, the lack of training, resources, evaluation, and prioritization of leadership transitions, indicates that the leadership transitions are not recognized as an area of practice on par with recruitment, onboarding, and offboarding. Considering the comprehensive number and detail of practices included in Dale's (2014) framework, it is surprising that leadership transitions are not treated as its own area of practice.

The descriptions of participants in this study mostly showed that leadership transitions are unpredictable and complex from HR's perspective. Considering these findings, I would hypothesize that leadership transitions are unpredictable and complex for HR precisely due to a lack of knowledge and expertise on the subject matter of leadership transitions. Indeed, Participant 1 serves as an exception to the norm in this regard.

Participant 1 had produced procedures and templates for the leadership transition process and its phases, including having tested these on and, thereby, trained line managers. Unlike the descriptions of other participants, Participant 1 described that HR is very little involved and that line managers manage the leadership transition process themselves and support each other where needed. How leadership transitions are coordinated is evaluated, meaning the leadership transition as a strategic whole, not select phases individually (Appendix C). Indicating that leadership transitions are not as unpredictable and complex from Participant 1's perspective as for other participants. Rather Participant 1's descriptions indicate that direct superiors can see the time and plan for the phases and processes. Thereby, not needing much fire extinguishing.

Establishing such a strategic practice is not done overnight though. Nevertheless, Dale's (2014) framework presents an opportunity for HR to evaluate their coordination efforts, transform their trainings from introduction programs to structured integrations, and co-create process descriptions, procedures, and templates together with direct superiors to enable them to coordinate leadership transitions in a strategic manner.

Coordination Efforts Largely Focused on Talent

Lastly, the descriptions of participants revealed that quite a large focus on talent. Evaluations were centered around individuals and their characteristics, leadership transitions were primarily discussed in terms of succession planning and talent pools, and considerable resources were devoted to talent acquisition seeking to source, identify, and select the right people. In this section, I will interpret these findings in relation to Dale's (2014) framework and existing literature.

When asked what the purpose of recruitment was, participants stated that it was to find the correct person. Dale (2014) challenges the notion that recruitment is about only finding the right person or ensuring person-environment fit (Kristof-

Brown et al., 2005), stating that it is also about preparing potential candidates and providing them with a realistic job preview. An example of this is participants' descriptions of using cases during the recruitment phase. While a minority described using cases as a realistic job preview, the most common practice was to use cases as a competence test for the purpose of selecting the right candidate. These findings indicated that HR is very focused on the people element of organizations.

Participant 4's statements regarding new leaders managing themselves during the start-up period presented a stark contrast to Dale (2014). The participant described they would check whether a candidate had the ability to take charge in a new position on autopilot during recruitment. The start-up period was considered the time when new leaders have plenty of time to take in all the new impressions and "tender" or soften up. Dale's framework outlines quite a different start-up period, filled with meetings, mappings, and seminars. Participant 4's description could be interpreted as there being excess organizational slack resources (Galbraith, 1973, as cited in Scott & Davis, 2016) during this period. Meaning that performance standards might lowered for new leaders from the perspective of HR during this initial period. However, Sando and Agerbo's (2019) thesis tells a more different story. New leaders do not experience this lowered expectation of performance, rather they experience the newcomer period as quite stressful. Indeed, taking Dale's process aspect into consideration, this initial period is crucial for a new leaders due to the formation of psychological contracts.

Based on Dale's (2014) framework, I would argue that HR's focus on talents is at the loss of the process aspect of leadership transitions. As described in the theory chapter, the process aspect is largely about what the relationships *mean* for the people involved. Based on Dotlich (2017), I would argue that it is the consequences of the transition for the process aspect that is left to the individuals to manage for themselves. Concretely, following from Wodak et al.'s (2011) argument that leaders are the primary managers of meaning, Dale's process aspect puts a spotlight on the meaning that is co-created in the leadership transition process. The process aspect is what I argue is missing from the description of Participant 4. Meaning that the consequences of leadership transitions for the process aspect is still seen as the talent's responsibility to manage. Indeed, participants described that HR has no role in start-up conversations, does not get

involved in how a new leader practices their first period, and describe leaders as sufficiently experienced to handle the process aspect of the leadership transition on their own. While the process perspective might not be perceived as central for HR, what the relationships that new leaders have established mean for the people involved will likely have significant bearing on their ability to lead.

As Richie (2021) points out, numerous studies have focused on the practicalities of change in leadership, however, it is often not the technical aspects that prove challenging, rather the relational aspects and establishing a new identity. Neglected process aspect may, therefore, help explain why widely cited statistics indicate that 40% to 50% of leaders fail (Arnulf, 2020; Levin, 2010). Neal and Rhyne (2021) find similar statistics showing that 35% of executive leaders promoted internally fail and 47% of externally hired leaders fail. Based on my findings and review of the literature, I believe Dale's structured integrations can reduce these failure rates by taking the process perspective into account.

Costs associated with leader turnover range from 30 to 40% of the leader's annual salary in direct hiring costs (Van Vark, 2006) up to 24 times their annual salary in direct and indirect costs combined (Manderscheid & Freeman, 2012). In the case of senior executives this can reach as high as US$2.7 million (Smart, 1999). While this study did not examine leader failure or turnover, these studies highlight the importance of emphasizing more than just the talent. Dale's (2014) framework and a structured integration approach to learning and development, thereby, presents a strong opportunity for HR to provide new leaders with resources to meet the stressful start-up period and mitigate leader failure and turnover. Considering Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) job demands-resources model, providing a structured integration might turn newcomer distress into eustress (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2016) and likely cut time to profit (see Dai et al., 2011) by up to 40%, from six to four months (Watkins, 2013). As this gap between Dale's framework and Participant 4's description shows that there is a gap in not just what leadership transitions mean for different people and what practice is involved in the concept.

Part Conclusion

Firstly, there is evidence to support the initial hypothesis that there is a gap between Dale's (2014) framework and practice. Furthermore, there are four insights that can be drawn from the discussion of the findings related to what

leadership transitions are like from the perspective of HR. First, given the large variation in terms of perceived approaches to coordinating leadership transitions, standardization efforts of leadership transitions appear challenging from the perspective of HR. However, adopting a practice perspective to reconceptualize routines as sources of flexibility and change could be an understanding that helps HR make use of Dale's (2014) framework.

Second, participants' descriptions implied that leadership transitions seem unpredictable and complex. In most cases, HR appear to be meeting these technical demands with centralization, formalization, and complexity on the part of HR structure and performers. However, Participant 1 appears to have adopted a more decentralized and informal approach, with complexity on the part of line managers so that they are enabled to coordinate leadership transitions for themselves.

Third, leadership transitions appear not to be prioritized or considered crucial from the perspective of HR. Rather considerable resources are devoted to recruitment in particular. This unbalanced allocation of resources and attention could be a threat to the strategic capability of the organization to coordinate leadership transitions. This might be because lack of training and familiarity with Dale's (2014) framework might make it difficult to see the time aspect and plan the phases thereafter. However, despite Dale's comprehensive framework, leadership transitions do not appear to enjoy the recognition as an area of practice in line with practice areas such as recruitment, onboarding, and succession planning.

Fourth and final, Dale's (2014) process aspect seems promising for HR given since this appears to be largely overlooked by HR. Talents seem to be left to manage the process aspect of Dale's (2014) framework on their own. This might pose a threat to ensuring fair and equal processes and psychological contracts, however, Dale's framework presents an opportunity to mitigate this potential risk with structured integrations.

What Role Does Dale's (2014) Leadership Transition Framework Play in Human Resources' Leadership Transition Processes in Large Private Companies in Norway?

Dale's (2014) Framework Plays a Very Small Role

The findings showed that Dale's (2014) framework currently plays a small role in HR's leadership transition processes in large private companies in Norway. Indeed, Appendix B shows an overview of the gaps between practices outlined by Dale and described practices by HR participants. Despite some activities overlapping such as use recruitment agencies, leadership gatherings, and handover, there are also gaps in *how* these practices are carried out. For example, Participants 6 and 9 reported organizing "new as a leader" programs or courses. While Dale describes these in connection with the settling-in stage, participants report organizing these courses for new leaders. Since Dale considers these programs to be introduction programs not structured integrations, there is a gap in *how* these initiatives are practiced. The same goes for handover, where participants describe varying ways of approaching the practice. Participant 1 stands as a contrast that helps illustrate what Dale means. Specifically, Participant 1 reported organizing leadership gatherings in connection with strategic gatherings, however, the key distinction is that these were not used as trainings for new leaders.

Covering all the gaps related to all the practices and how these are done would go on endlessly. Simply put, the findings provide evidence to support the initial hypothesis that there is a gap between Dale's (2014) framework and HR's described practice. Arguably, the gap is–as Storey et al. (2008) noted about the gap between HR theory and practice–a great divide. One could easily be led to believe that Dale's framework is a map of a different territory. Indeed, the participants' descriptions align much better with theory on succession planning (Berke, 2005; Hagemann et al., 2017; Harrell, 2016) and the leadership pipeline (Charan et al., 2011). Participants describe identifying critical positions and high potentials, and strategically developing successors in a talent pool. Identifying critical positions revolves around the top managerial positions in the company. Talents with high potential are identified through engagement surveys, the performance management system, and discussions between the senior management. Talents are then developed though both organizational level

learning and leadership programs or gatherings that cover topics such as leading yourself, leading others, and leading the organization.

However, just as HR is responsible for succession planning, they are responsible for coordinating leadership transitions (Ciampa & Dotlich, 2015). The finding of this thesis that HR does not appear to be coordinating leadership transitions according to Dale's framework. A simple distinction can help clarify why Dale's framework appears to have no role in the leadership transitions of large private companies in Norway.

It Boils Down to Leadership Change or Leadership Transition

Participant 7 stated that "the *change* [emphasis added] itself is not something that HR does alone" (Own translation). According to Manderscheid and Harrower (2016), most leadership transition literature subscribe to Bridges' (2016) suggested distinction between changes as concrete and situational events and transitions as ongoing psychological processes. As Bridges puts it: "change + human beings = transition" (p. 154). This distinction between change and transition helps conceptually distinguish Dale's (2014) framework of leadership transitions from the practice described by participants in this study. Specifically, participants in this study are concerned with the people, the practicalities of leadership change, and the concrete and situational evens. For example, identifying successors, creating pipelines, and measuring performance. Dale, on the other hand, is concerned with the ongoing (social) psychological processes such as socialization, personalization, and the psychological contract. While participants generally are concerned with people, Dale is concerned with the practices, phases, roles (i.e., people *in relation* to other people), and processes. In fact, Dale does not offer any theory on *who* (i.e., talent) regarding leadership transitions, only that self-understanding and role-understanding are basic preconditions for leaders to exercise their role. Column 3 in Appendix B further illustrates this. Succession planning not covered in Dale's framework and he also does not mention important meeting-points that participants in this study emphasized. For example, leadership transition start-up meetings between direct superior and HR to plan the leadership transition. Start-up meetings between HR and new leaders, introducing them to HR and various administrative practicalities related to salary, pension, accesses, and so on. Simply put, while Dale is concerned with the transition, the descriptions of the participants in this study

indicate that they are concerned with the change. I would, therefore, argue that Dale's framework has the potential to offer a wealth of insight to HR departments that let his framework have a larger role such as Participant 1. To illustrate this, I will offer my final remarks on three key focus areas that I believe Dale's framework can contribute with value to HR.

The Potential Role of Dale's (2014) Leadership Transition Framework in The Leadership Transition Practice of Human Resources

That Dale's (2014) framework plays such a small role in the leadership transition practice of HR highlights three limitations of their current approach. Namely that HR's current approach appears context independent, retrospective, and leader centric. Dale's framework, therefore, holds great promise for helping HR overcome these limitations and improve the coordination of leadership transitions.

First, I would argue that the approach described by participants appears context independent. As described in the theory chapter, Dale (2014) takes views leadership transitions as practice. There is an inferential leap (Harvey & Wilson, 2000; Sanchez & Levine, 2013) from practice to what type of competence is needed to perform this practice. For example, both a person that operates a 3D-printer and a carpenter can perform the work of building a cabin. They just use different tools. Similarly, the practice of leadership transitions can be done, or coordinated, using various competencies and capabilities. There is no one best way to organize (Scott & Davis, 2016). Competence is, thereby, considered to be context specific (McKenna, 2004) as it has to do with a relation between a person and the situation that they are acting in. While focusing on the talent surely is important, neglecting the context in terms of the meaning that is co-constructed in the polarity between socialization and personalization arguably oversimplifies the complex work of leadership (Jamil, 2015). As mentioned, start-up conversations are largely left to managers themselves to manage. It is in the performance of these practices that the tension or polarity between socialization and personalization takes place and affects the meaning that is co-constructed. Or, in simpler terms, what sort of psychological contract that is created. HR does not appear to support leaders in the performance of these practices with resources such as conversation templates or Wodak et al.'s (2011) five discursive strategies. Creating a competitive advantage for the leaders that are able to deal with this

polarity. Indeed, as one of the participants put it, "you are your own fortune maker". Lastly, Hofsmarken (2020) has argued against individualist approaches to leadership development, pointing out limitations of taking leaders out of their real-life context, and Rønning (2005) has questioned whether something that has been developed in one context can be transferred to another. In fact, Groysberg et al. (2008) have found that performance or competence is not something that is automatically transportable. While the utility of the leadership development programs and gatherings described by participants could be questioned, this presents an opportunity to rethink the approach organizations take, specifically in terms of leadership transitions as leadership development. This is the first key realization Dale's framework can help contribute to HR.

The second criticism is that participants' descriptions of the programs and gatherings show that these practices are retrospective. While the topics of these leadership gatherings in some cases are in line with three of the four learning areas for new first-time leaders outlined by Dale and Haaland (2004), the authors also emphasize prospective learning rather than retrospective learning (Mumford, 1994). Proactive learning entails creating a plan for the leadership transition that includes learning concrete skills, implementing the plan, reviewing the plan, and reaching conclusions. Retrospective learning entails going through the leadership transition and being in a leadership role for six months, reviewing this experience at a leadership gathering, and reaching conclusions. Based on the findings of this study, I would argue that most of the cases fall into the retrospective approach with regards to how their leaders learn to manage leadership transitions. The only exception would be Participant 1, who described a tailored, individual training. Simply put, a prospective approach to leadership transitions would entail that new leaders are involved in the creation of a plan for the transition, that they take ownership for implementing the plan themselves, review the plan, then reach conclusions. Most participants, however, describe that creating a plan for onboarding is the responsibility of direct superior, who in some cases is disinterested or lacks the expertise. Rather, most participants describe emphasizing leadership gatherings or new leader assimilations that take place quite some time into a new leader's reign. Dale's framework, thereby, presents an opportunity to map out the practices, plan to learn them, implement, reflect, and develop.

Lastly, the approach of succession planning, and leadership pipelines can be criticized as leader centric in the sense of emphasizing (potential) leaders detached from their followers (Northouse, 2021). Again, evaluations emphasize individuals, discussions are about successors, and recruitment is about acquiring talent. Participant 1's approach stands as a contrast to illustrate the exception to the norm. From the descriptions of HR, leadership transitions are largely about finding the heroic leader. Dale's (2014) framework, in particular the process aspect, helps shift the perspective of HR from merely talent to the interactions, dialogues, and processes.

For these reasons, I would argue that these three areas–context independence, retrospectivity, and leader centricity–present promising opportunities for HR to improve with regards to coordinating leadership transitions.

Part Conclusion

The discussion of the findings argue that Dale's (2014) framework appears to play a small role in leadership transitions of human resources in large private companies in Norway. The gap is argued to be a chasm, with Dale's framework emphasizing leadership transitions and the study's participants mostly describing leader change which aligns better with leadership pipeline theory. This leader change approach is criticized for being context independent, retrospective, and leader centric, illustrating the potential that Dale's framework must inform newfound initiatives for HR.

Limitations and Alternative Explanations

There are several possible limitations regarding this study. Due to time and resource constraints, the study was narrow in scope and used interviews used as a method for gathering data about HR's practice. Using interviews for a comparative multi-case study may have provided limited insight, over-rationalistic accounts, and not been conductive to exposing bad practice or hidden practices (Bell et al., 2018). Furthermore, although interviewing HR professionals was a resource efficient way of gathering data, how these practices may have been implemented and perceived by line managers (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Kuvaas, 2008; Nishii et al. 2008). However, using interviews was not very intrusive and allowed me a greater breadth of coverage while maintaining a focus on providing an overview of HR's current practices and comparing these practices.

Additionally, as a master's student who conducted by bachelors at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, I had limited experience regarding my research and methodology which influenced the data collection and analysis process. A measure I took to mitigate my limited interviewing experience, was to provide participants with information about the project and the interview guide beforehand. However, only two participants had the time to prepare, and several participants struggled to express or accurately represent their practice. This is a possibility because it is challenging to talk about all of HR's practice regarding a comprehensive topic such as leadership transitions on your feet. To address this issue, I adjusted the interview guide and asked for examples of plans, procedures, and templates.

Furthermore, using a deductive qualitative analysis entails a risk that I was only sensitive to ideas related to Dale's (2014) framework and, therefore, may have overlooked data that could be important to my study. To mitigate this risk, I selected cases that showed promise both of adhering to Dale's framework and of challenging or undermining the framework. It is also likely that the reason the findings revealed evidence supporting that leadership transitions are not coordinated was that HR is not coordinating for leadership transitions. Rather they are coordinating for a talent or leadership pipeline (Charan et al., 2011).

Concluding Summary

In this chapter I discussed the findings in connection to the two research questions. First, regarding what leadership transitions of large private companies in Norway are like from a human resource perspective, there findings indicated that leadership transitions are challenging to standardize, unpredictable, complex, not a priority, and overlooked.

Four insights were drawn from the discussion. First, while efforts to standardize leadership transitions appear to be challenging, reconceptualizing routines as a source of flexibility and change holds promise for broadening HR's perspective and making use of Dale's (2014) framework. Second, given the technical uncertainties and complexities likely associated with leadership transitions, adopting a decentralized and informal approach where line managers are enabled to coordinate leadership transitions seems like a promising endeavor. Third, emphasizing more aspects of leadership transitions than recruitment such as the other phases or processes, holds promise for strengthened strategic

coordination of leadership transitions. It is remarked that, despite Dale's comprehensive framework of practices, leadership transitions do are not afforded the same status as other areas of practice such as onboarding or succession planning. Fourth, while the overlooked process aspect of leadership transitions might pose a threat if ignored, Dale's framework presents an opportunity to turn this into a competitive advantage through structured integrations. In sum, from HR's perspective there is evidence to suggest that there is a considerable gap between Dale's framework and practice.

Related to the second research question, it is argued based on the findings that Dale's (2014) framework plays a small role in leadership transitions of HR in large private Norwegian companies. There is evidence to suggest that this gap is a chasm, considering that what participants appear to describe practicing is leader change, not leadership transitions. Dale's framework is used to highlight potential drawbacks with leader change such as context independence, retrospectivity, and leader centricity, to argue for opportunities presented using Dale's framework. In sum, Dale's framework plays a small role, but has great potential. In sum, there is a gap between Dale's framework and HR participants' descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated to a large extent.

Conclusion

In this chapter I will conclude this study by relating the key findings to the research aim and research questions, offer recommendations, outline theoretical contributions, and suggest directions for future research.

Key Findings

This study aimed to test Dale's (2014; 2015) framework against HR participants' descriptions of existing practice and clarify the extent to which there is a gap between Dale's framework and practice in the context of large private companies in Norway that have operated for more than 10 years. The analysis of the participants' descriptions found that approaches to coordinating leadership transitions varied greatly. Furthermore, coordination efforts largely depend on circumstance, lack balance, and have a large focus on talent. The discussion of these findings suggested evidence for a large gap between Dale's framework and practice. Further, from the perspective of HR, leadership transitions appear challenging to standardize, however, reconceptualizing routines as a source of flexibility and change holds promise for broadening HR's perspective and making use of Dale's (2014) framework. Since leadership transitions also seem uncertain and complex, enabling line managers to coordinate leadership transitions themselves holds promise. As the process aspect of Dale's framework appears to be overlooked, it seems promising for enabling strategic coordination of leadership transitions and providing a competitive advantage through structured integrations of new leaders. Lastly, Dale's framework plays a small role in the leadership transitions of large private companies in Norway. Based on these findings, the conclusion to the research problem statement is, therefore, that there is quite a large gap between Dale's framework and HR's descriptions of how leadership transitions are coordinated.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, I offer the following recommendations:

- Standardization efforts such as DNV-GL or organizational certifications regarding leadership transitions should be implemented. Auditors can use this thesis to inform protocols to help establish best practices for organizations and make

standardization less challenging. A good place to start would be to standardize handover.

- That leadership transitions should be established as an area of practice in line with other areas of practice such as recruitment, onboarding, succession planning, performance management, and so on. For example, this implies that it has its own process description and procedure, HR process owner, evaluation procedures, and HR-/management-system module such as in SAP Success Factors or Workday.

- In column 2 of the overview in Appendix B, a list of practices for HR to consider such as start-up seminars, individual leadership agreements, and resources or templates for interim practices such as mandates or logbook of what was done, decisions made or postponed, who was responsible, status of projects or processes, and what the new leader inherits.

- A low entry starting point with leadership transitions such as creating a course in the company's LMS that covers the process in full. This will help provide an overarching view so that the time can be seen more clearly and thus the phases planned better.

- Procedures, process descriptions, and evaluation templates should be created not only for the leadership transition process, but for all phases.

Theoretical Contributions

By testing Dale's (2014) framework against existing practice, the following theoretical contributions were made:

- Dale's (2014) framework translated into English, so that it may be applied, tested, and contributed to by a wider audience, both academic and practice oriented.

- Figure 2: Framework of Roles in a Leadership Transition, mapping the key interdependencies that HR is responsible for coordinating during a leadership transition.

- In column 3 of the overview in Appendix B, a list of practices not included in Dale's original framework such as HR start-up

conversations with line managers. Including succession planning as an area of practice.

- A distinction between companies where HR takes ownership of the leadership transition practices from companies HR enables line managers to accomplish the tasks themselves

Directions for Future Research

- An in-depth case study into how the organization of Participant 1 coordinates leadership transitions.
- Since selecting for maximum variation provided quite varied findings, it may be more fruitful to narrow the scope even further. This can be done by, for example, either focusing on one level of leadership, such as front-line, middle, or top management, or focusing on organizations with more similar organizational structure. I expect defining organizations with more than 5 000 employees as large will yield a more homogenous group for comparison.
- Studies into how direct superior coordinates leadership transitions and how new leaders coordinate leadership transitions

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