

Mastering the Leader Role:

How individuals in leader roles increase leader role efficacy and trust in subordinates,
(re)construct leader identities, and attempt to craft leader roles that fit

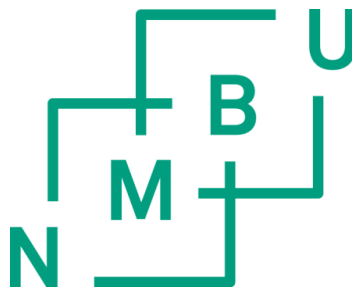
Tre tilnærminger til mestring av lederrollen

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

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List of papers

- Paper 1** **Leadership coaching, leader role efficacy, and trust in subordinates.**
A mixed methods study assessing leadership coaching as a leadership development tool
Ladegård, G. & Gjerde, S.
The Leadership Quarterly (2014) 1-16
- Paper 2** **Developing leader identities: An empirical study of the content of leader identities and how they change**
Gjerde, S.
- Paper 3** **Crafting the leader role: Strategies and dynamics of leader role and leader identities in creating person-to-role fit**
Gjerde, S. & Ladegård, G.

Abstract

People have a psychological need to master their environment and the roles they enact (Ashforth, 2001). Individuals who take on leader roles are no exception. However, as the leader role is filled with complex, demanding, conflicting and ambiguous role expectations (Conger & Fishel, 2007; Denis, Langley, & Pineault, 2000; Levin, 2010) mastering the leader role may be particularly challenging. This thesis addresses three complementary approaches to mastering the leader role and deals with each approach in a separate paper.

The first paper suggests that leadership coaching may increase a sense of mastery of the leader role. With the use of a two-phase exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) consisting of a focus group study and a longitudinal, quasi-experimental field study, the paper develops theory on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool and proposes that leader role efficacy (LRE) and leaders' trust in subordinates (LTS) represent two valuable outcome variables to be measured. Using data from a group of individuals attending a six months' leadership coaching program, the study finds that both LRE and LTS increased among the participants (but not among individuals in a control group) and that facilitative coaching behavior helps explain the changes. Furthermore the study finds that increased LTS is related to decreased turnover intentions among the participants' subordinates, suggesting that leadership coaching may benefit not only individuals aiming to master their leader roles, but also their subordinates and the organizations in which they work.

The second paper explores leader identities (self-in-leader-role meanings) that may help managers master the leader role by locating themselves within the role. Through an explorative qualitative study using an open questionnaire and in-depth interviews, the paper investigates the content of leader identities and how they change. The paper contributes to the literature by offering a three-component structure of leader identities (leadership mode, attributes and values) that complements more simple interpretations and which may advance

our understanding of how individuals engage in leadership and develop as leaders. Drawing upon a variety of identity theories and merging two identity perspectives in particular (“storied-self”, McAdams (1996) and “self-in-role-meaning” Burke and Stets (2009); McCall and Simmons (1978)) the paper offers a theory explaining how leader identities change via two main mechanisms during a reconstruction of stories, and proposes a first step for integrating opposing streams of leader identity research.

The third and final paper investigates how managers attempt to gain control over the leader role by crafting roles that fit their sense of self. Employing a multiple case research design with semi-structured interviews across four different contexts this study reveals four strategies (present, adapt, challenge and explore) used by experienced managers to address their subordinates’ leader role expectations, and shows how leader identities both aid and impede the process. The paper contributes to the leader role and identity literature by offering a contemporary interpretation of the leader role and a theory of *role crafting*.

The thesis presents empirical insights and theorizing that extend and build theory contributing to the leader role, leader identity, leadership development, and leadership coaching literature, and contributes to practice by suggesting three complementary ways to help managers in their attempts to master the leader role.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the underlying theme that runs across the three papers that comprise this thesis: *mastering the leader role*. People are driven by a basic psychological need to master subjectively important domains and roles in their lives (Ashforth, 2001). This thesis addresses how individuals attempt to master the *leader role*. Throughout the thesis the leader role is interpreted as pre-existing and emerging expectations of leadership tasks/duties (e.g., define goals), attitudes (e.g., long-term perspective), and behaviors (e.g., consideration) that belong to a managerial position. In paper 3 we argue that the leader role is a more inclusive term than the leadership role. Whereas the *leadership* role tends to evoke associations of leadership behaviors aimed to *influence* such as change, we suggest that the *leader* role also includes a “social role” that is associated with a set of normative and anticipatory expectations (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 64) in the form of attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors held toward the person who occupies the position to which the role is linked.

Mastery over a role may lead to emotional wellbeing (Martire, Stephens, & Townsend, 1998) and influence how central the role becomes to one’s sense of self, which again represents a powerful determinant for role behavior (Norton, Gupta, Stephens, Martire, & Townsend, 2005). The importance of feeling a sense of mastery is perhaps most apparent for managers who experience a lack of mastery and as a consequence become over-controlling and struggle with “giving up control without losing control” (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999, p. 155). Attempting to master the leader role may therefore be a vital goal for managers who are expected to engage in leadership. Helping managers toward this goal may also be an important aim for the organizations in which they work. A survey exploring why companies invest in leadership coaching (performed among 303 representative organizations from among

a sample of 2961 organizations with more than 100 employees in Norway) found that one of the most important objectives was to help managers master the leader role (Ladegård, 2008).

However, mastering the leader role may be a particularly challenging endeavor. The leader role is complex, demanding (Conger & Fishel, 2007) and interdependently linked with counter roles such as the follower (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Furthermore, today's managers are faced with constantly changing leader role expectations as the frequency at which they change jobs both within and across organizations is increasing (Conger & Fishel, 2007; Levin, 2010). Due to the complex and evolving nature of leader roles there is no single approach to gain a sense of mastery of this role. This thesis explores three complementary approaches.

Three approaches to mastering the leader role

Mastery over a role has been defined as the *belief* that one is *competent* in managing the events that occur in a given role in order to create wanted outcomes (Martire et al., 1998). Thus one approach to mastering a leader role may imply increasing *efficacy beliefs* regarding one's ability to engage in the leadership tasks and behavioral and attitudinal expectations that comprise one's leader role. The first paper of this thesis deals with this approach and explores how leadership coaching may be used to increase a general feeling of mastery of the leader role, leader role efficacy (LRE) and leaders' trust in subordinates (LTS).

Another dimension of mastering a role is linked to feeling in *control* of events that occur in the role (Ashforth, 2001; Norton et al., 2005). A way to gain such a sense of control is to *bring oneself into line* with events that happen in the role through the development of role identities (Ashforth, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2003). Paper 2 explores the content of leader identities (self-in-leader-role meanings) that help managers define who they are in the role and mechanisms for leader identity change.

Finally, a third approach to mastering a role involves developing the capacity to influence the environment by *changing role expectations* to make them better fit oneself

(Ashforth, 2001). Paper 3 develops theory on this approach in a process we refer to as *role crafting*. The paper describes four strategies (present, adapt, challenge and explore) employed by experienced managers to address the leader role expectations of their subordinates and shows how their leader identities both facilitate and hinder the role crafting process. We suggest three metaphors to describe the different functions of leader identities (guide, anchor and bouncing wall) and propose that role crafting may be taught through formal leadership development programs to help managers master their leader role.

Although mastering the leader role is the common theme that runs across the three papers in this thesis, each paper is set in a different literature and so contributes to different fields of leadership research including leadership development, leader role efficacy, trust, identity, and role development.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 Theoretical framework

In this chapter I present the main theories and concepts that provide the theoretical framework for my thesis: *role theory* (with a particular focus on the leader role and role development); *leadership development theory* (attending to leadership coaching in particular); and *identity theory* (focusing on leader identity). Since the theories are thoroughly described in the respective papers, I will only offer a brief review of them in this chapter with the aim of introducing key definitions and pointing to areas of interest and/or gaps in the literature to which I will attend. However, theory on the leader role will receive a more detailed introduction since it represents the common denominator that binds the three papers together but is not addressed as attentively in them.

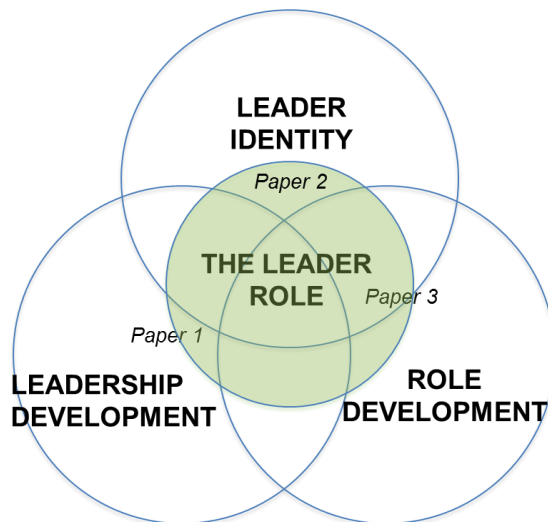


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework of the thesis and shows how the various theories are connected by a shared link to the leader role and how each paper is set in the intersection between the leader role and the paper's respective literature. I will start by presenting theory on the leader role and its current state in organizational literature before I introduce theory on

leadership development and leader identity. I will end the chapter by summing up the main objectives of the papers that comprise the thesis and the research questions that will be addressed. But first I will address the terms leadership, leader and manager that are used throughout the thesis.

I share Yukl's interpretation of *leadership* as a "social influence process" (Yukl, 2013, p. 23). I agree with most scholars that people in managerial positions need to address both leadership (social influence) and management (administration) to be effective (Yukl, 2013). I believe in line with Mintzberg (1973) that the leader role is one of several roles that belong to a managerial position (although I acknowledge that informal leader roles also exist). I prefer the term *manager* since I believe there are very few managerial positions that allow individuals only to attend to leadership, and so manager seems the more appropriate term. However, due to the preferred language of the journals to which the papers have been and will be submitted, we employ the terms *leader* in paper 1 and *manager* in papers two and three. Any further debate regarding the difference between leaders and managers is outside the scope of this thesis.

Role theories and the leader role

There exist a multitude of interpretations of the leader role, many of them inspired by Katz and Kahn's (1966) and Mintzberg's (1973) seminal books. In their book introducing Organizational Role Theory (ORT) Katz and Kahn describe roles as "*standardized patterns of behavior*" associated with given *tasks* that are tied to organizational positions (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 37). They propose three types of leadership behavior that comprise the leader role: the introduction of structural change, improvisation, and the use of structure to keep the organization in motion. According ORT the tasks and behavioral expectations (roles) that belong to an organizational position are sent and received by the role incumbent and his role set (superior, peers, subordinates) (Katz & Kahn, 1966). These roles are to a considerable

extent determined by the broader organizational context, but will be influenced by the attributes of the role incumbent and interpersonal factors (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

According to Mintzberg's empirical study on the managers' job, the leader role is one of the most significant among the ten roles a manager has to play (Mintzberg, 1973). Mintzberg suggests that the leader role includes a set of leadership *activities* such as: encouraging subordinates, defining the atmosphere in which the organization will work, and bringing subordinate and organizational needs into a common accord (Mintzberg, 1973). Building on Mintzberg (1973), McCall and Segrist (1978) develop a measure for the leader role comprising 11 leadership activities such as "provide new employees with training", "give negative feedback", "facilitate subordinates growth", and "integrate subordinates' goals with company requirements" (Tsui, 1984, p. 72). On a similar note, others suggest that the leader role involves activities and tasks such as providing the organization with a direction (Shamir & Howell, 1999) and being responsible for goal attainment (Hoyt, Price, & Poatsy, 2013).

Throughout the 1970s and 80s more dynamic interpretations of the managerial role, which includes the leader role, are introduced to the organizational literature. Rather than suggest that the leader role exists only as a set of predefined tasks and standardized patterns of behavior to be learned and executed, these studies argue that the role is dynamic and develops due to the manager's discretion in the role (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975; Stewart, 1982; Tsui, 1984; Tsui & Ashford, 1994). *Discretion* refers to the opportunity to alter the task characteristics and content of their roles (i.e., components of goals and means-end relationships involving both people and materials) (Nicholson, 1984). Through the individual's choices (Stewart, 1982) and ways of responding to superiors, peers, and subordinates, the leader role changes with its role incumbent and their role set (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975). In other words the leader role emerges out of social interaction as interactional role theories (Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2006) suggest. Paper 3 gives a more detailed

account of these studies addressing role development and presents our own theorizing on how we suggest today's managers attempt to develop leader roles that fit their sense of self.

Toward the end of the 1990s the leader role disappears from academia. Judging from the paucity of papers on the leader/ship role in management journals from this period until today, it seems that the leader role concept simply fell out of favor or fashion. A search I conducted for papers addressing the leader/ship role in a number of high impact journals (Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, British Academy of Management Journal, Human Relations, Human Resource Management, Organization, Organizational Science, Personnel Psychology, and the Leadership Quarterly) revealed only a few papers written in the 21st century that attend to the leader role in its own right (Day, Sin, & Chen, 2004; Hooijberg & Choi, 2000; Hoyt et al., 2013; Klein, Ziegert, Knight, & Xiao, 2006). Today the leader role concept is almost non-existent in leadership research (Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006) and the role has been largely dismissed in the contemporary identity literature (Simpson & Carroll, 2008).

One possible reason for the leader role's disappearance may have been the major controversy in the field of leadership research in regards to whether or not one should view leadership as a specialized role or as a shared influence process (Yukl, 2013). With today's contemporary perspective on leadership as a "complex, multi-level and socially constructed process" (Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Claudia, 2010, p. 952), one does not necessarily want to tie leadership to a position or reinforce a behavioral perspective on leadership.

An additional reason for a waning interest in the leader role may have been the entry of identity into the organizational discourse and the growing popularity of social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) in the leadership literature. (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Turner & Haslam, 2001; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005). While roles were criticized for being static and deterministic

(Levinson, 1959; Simpson & Carroll, 2008; Stryker, 2006) and built on the assumption of an over-socialized conception of man (Wrong, 1961), identities were perceived as dynamic concepts that provide individuals with agency (Ashforth, 2001) and so may have been more tempting to pursue in research.

Nevertheless, despite its disappearance from academic scrutiny the term leader role continues to be used by managers when referring to their everyday practice. In the first study we conducted (paper 1) it became apparent that mastering the leader role is an important goal of managers who attend leadership coaching. However, searching the literature for perspectives on the leader role and ways to master it, we found that while several scholars address the leader role implicitly as a context or a perspective in their studies, few investigate the leader role in itself. Realizing this paucity of contemporary studies attending to the leader role, the overall objective of this thesis became to provide a theoretically and empirically founded interpretation of the leader role set in the 21st century and to propose theory on alternative ways to help managers master the leader role.

Role development theory

In paper 3 we explore how managers attempt to gain control over the evolving leader role by addressing leader role expectations of their subordinates. Due to a general lack of recent studies on the leader role, this paper draws upon research between the 1970s and the 1990s when analyzing our data. These previous studies offer valuable perspectives on role development, but unfortunately they tend to present macro perspectives on how the role changes (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 1995; Graen, 1976; Nicholson, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988; Turner, 1962). What is missing is a more fine-grained understanding of the role development process in terms of the actual strategies employed and, just as important, an understanding of the leader role that is set in the 21st century. Paper 3 offers such a contemporary interpretation of the evolving leader role seen through the eyes of experienced

senior managers and a detailed description of the role development process in the form of four role-crafting strategies. The paper contributes to role and identity theories and to practice through suggestions for leadership development.

Leadership development theory

Paper 1 is set in the field of leadership development. *Leadership development* refers to the development of organizational members' collective capacity to effectively engage in leadership (Day, 2000; Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman, 2010). Leadership development includes both the development of collective leadership capacity, that is *interpersonal* competence (e.g., trust, social awareness and social skills) and *leader development* that attends to the development of *intrapersonal* competence (e.g., self-awareness, self-confidence and self-regulation) of individuals in leader roles (Day, 2000; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). Leadership coaching has been suggested as a promising leadership development tool (Day, 2000; Ely et al., 2010). *Leadership coaching* refers to one-on-one counseling of executives, leaders and managers about work-related issues with the aim of improving leadership effectiveness (Ely et al., 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

While leadership development has had a long term standing among practitioners, there has been a shortage of systematic investigations of leadership development interventions (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010) and a disconnection between theory and practice (Day, 2000) with theory lagging behind (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009). This lack of systematic evaluation is also characteristic for leadership coaching (Ely et al., 2010) and appropriate outcome criteria needed for systematic evaluation are missing (MacKie, 2007; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). Without a better connection between theory and practice, and the testing of theories across empirical settings, theory development is hindered and companies risk investing in costly leadership development programs that have unintended

or negligible effects. Paper 1 addresses these concerns and aims to develop theory on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool by proposing outcome variables founded in theory and practice and by testing these in a field study using a rigorous research design.

Leader identity theory

Paper 2 is founded in the leader identity literature. Ashforth (2001) has described how individuals attempt to gain control over events that happen in roles through the development of role identities (self-in-role meanings). Leader identity has been suggested as playing a crucial role in enabling effective leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007) and accelerating leader development (Day et al., 2009). Thus developing a leader identity may be an approach to master the leader role. Unfortunately the field of leadership is lacking in empirical studies that address the content of leader identities (Muir, 2012). Paper 2 addresses this gap.

Social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) holds a central role in leader identity research (Ibarra, Wittman, Petriglieri, & Day, 2014). A social identity perspective on leader identity suggests that leader identities may be understood in terms of how strongly individuals identify with the social leader category, how prototypical they find themselves to be of the leader role, and how central their identification with being a leader is to their self-definition (Rus, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010). However, the social identity perspective is incapable of describing the unique and essential characteristics of leader identities (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Furthermore not everyone in leader roles believes that they are prototypical of the role (e.g., female leaders, Ibarra et al., 2014), but they may still have self-in-role meanings that influence how they interpret and enact the role.

Consequently it has been argued that leader identities are better understood as *personal* identities (DeRue et al., 2009; Hall, 2004) that are based on the personal traits, abilities, and interests of the individual (Ashforth, 2001). Such an understanding implies not

only interpreting leader identity as identification with *being* a leader, but also the contextualized understanding of *who* one is as a leader. What is needed is a theoretical structure that helps explain the content of these personal leader identities and theory on how the content changes and leads to the development of new leader identities. Paper 2 contributes to the leadership and identity literature by suggesting an empirically founded identity structure and a theory on how leader identities change.

Objectives and Research questions

In this chapter I have presented the main theories that provide a foundation for three approaches aimed at mastering the leader role, and have pointed to gaps and areas of interest in the literature that are addressed in the three papers that comprise this thesis. Since each paper is set in a different field of research and aims to contribute to its respective field, the overall aim of mastering the leader role will not be as prevalent in each paper. I will now present the main objectives of each paper and the research questions they deal with. The answers to these research questions will together advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of different approaches to mastering the leader role and contribute to practice by suggesting ways to incorporate these insights and theories into leadership development programs.

Paper 1

Objective: Develop theory on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool by offering theoretically and empirically founded outcome variables and providing summative (assessing effectiveness) and formative (areas for improvement) evaluation of leadership coaching.

Research questions:

- What generic outcome criteria should be used to assess the effect of leadership coaching?
- Does leadership coaching have a positive effect on these outcome criteria?
- To what extent do differences in facilitative coaching behavior influence this effect?

Paper 2

Objective: Advance our empirical and theoretical understanding of the content of leader identities and the mechanisms through which they change.

Research questions:

- What is the content of leader identities?
- What is the relative proportion of idiosyncratic and conventional aspects of leader identities?
- How do leader identities change?

Paper 3

Objective: Develop a theory of strategies for creating person-to-role fit that attends to both role and identity.

Research questions:

- What role-crafting strategies will managers use in order to attempt to create person-to-role fit?
- How will the managers' leader identities influence these role-crafting strategies?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Chapter 3 Research design and method

In this chapter I describe the chosen research designs and methods for the three papers and the rationale behind these choices. Since it is commonly argued that “no cookbook or recipe exists for qualitative research” (Graebner, Martin, & Roundy, 2012, p. 276), I will give a more elaborate account of the multiple case research design and procedures of qualitative analysis applied in papers 2 and 3 since they may require a more detailed explanation.

Paper 1: Exploratory sequential design with mixed methods

Since leadership coaching is a fairly new field lacking in theory, we chose a two-phase exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) to address our three research questions and provide a comprehensive account of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool. We used mixed methods (MM) in which elements of qualitative and quantitative research methods were combined (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) to help us see our phenomenon of interest from different points of view and gain a more complete picture than any one method could provide alone (Bryman, Becker, & Sempik, 2008).

In the first phase of the study we conducted a focus group discussion (with five of the seven experienced coaches who were participating in our study) to determine outcome variables. We used the focus group as a method to collect extensive ideas, opinions, and understandings that may have been more difficult to obtain through individual interviews (Wilkinson, 2008). To ensure that our final outcome variables were based in both practice and theory we conducted a literature review and compared the data from our focus group analysis to extant theory. This comparison resulted in the choice of two already existing measures on psychological empowerment and turnover intention and the development of two new measures: leader role efficacy (LRE) and leader’s trust in subordinates (LTS). To validate

these two developed measures we sent out a survey to 195 leaders in two financial institutions. 120 completed the survey. A factor analysis (varimax rotation) revealed that LRE and LTS were two separate constructs and further analysis (comparing our new measures with similar constructs) presented satisfactory results for both discriminant and convergent validity.

In the second phase we tested the effects of leadership coaching on the outcome variables developed in the first phase, through a longitudinal quasi-experimental field study. The leaders in the intervention (coaching) group attended eight coaching sessions over a six months' period. We collected pre- and post-test measures from the intervention group and a control group. Each group included leaders and their subordinates. At time one 34 leaders (27 coaching participants and 7 in the control group) and 192 subordinates took part in the study. At time two we had data from 24 leaders in the intervention group, 6 in the control group, and 80 subordinates (2.7 per leader), and this represented our final data sample.

We tested the effects of the coaching program on our outcome variables (LRE and LTS) using independent-samples t-tests comparing the means in the two groups at time one and time two. To provide evidence that the leaders in the coaching group changed behavior following coaching, we correlated changes in trust-scores among the coaching participants with changes in their subordinates psychological empowerment and turnover intentions. And finally, to test the effects of the coach's behavior on the outcome variables, we conducted regression analyses on the intervention group regressing LRE and LTS on the coaches' facilitative behavior (controlling for the variance at T1).

To the best of our knowledge this study is the first to investigate the outcome of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool using a mixed methods design and a longitudinal quasi-experimental field study, including control group and multisource data.

Papers 2 and 3: Inductive multiple case research design with qualitative methods

The objective of papers 2 and 3 was to develop theory on leader identities and leader roles. Both papers used an inductive, multiple case research design (Eisenhardt, 1989) with qualitative data analysis methods. This design was chosen since the comparison of multiple cases may improve theory building (Bryman, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1991; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews (90–120 minutes) with 28 experienced, senior managers from four organizational contexts in Norway (the military, public service, banking/finance, and technology service). The transcribed interviews (455 pages of single spaced typing) provided the data employed in both papers, but paper 2 also used data collected from an open questionnaire answered by 42 additional managers (22 from an insurance company and 20 from technology service) who were asked to reflect upon ‘who am I as a leader?’

When comparing multiple cases, the case unit of analysis may be an organization, an event, a process, or as in papers 2 and 3 an individual and an organizational context. The selected contexts were chosen to represent *polar types*, which are extreme contexts to be compared to facilitate theory development (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). The contexts were extreme along two main dimensions: preparation time for a new managerial role (high in the military, low in technology services) and predefined leader role expectations (high in the military, low in technology services). Public service and banking/finance were chosen to represent contexts in between. The participating managers were purposefully selected from these chosen contexts following a set of selection criteria (leadership experience, recent role transition and tenure with the organization) with the aim of facilitating the discovery and development of concepts relating to leader identities and roles.

The multiple case research design allowed each case (individuals and contexts) to be compared to the other cases and helped confirm or disconfirm the inferences drawn from

previous ones. Consequently the inducted models should be more reliable when this research design is used (compared to a single case study) (Eisenhardt, 1989).

A main concern of a case study design is that it provides little basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003). However, case studies are not meant to be generalizable to populations or universes but to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003). The goal of papers 2 and 3 was to expand and generalize theories, not to provide statistical generalization in the form of frequencies.

Another concern of case studies is a potential lack of rigor since this research design does not necessarily have a set of specific procedures that must be followed (Yin, 2003). This concern was addressed in papers 2 and 3 by using procedures for data collection and analysis inspired by grounded theory (GT) (Charmaz, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and Eisenhardt (1989). GT consists of five fundamental tenets: constant comparative methods; theoretical coding; theoretical sampling; theoretical saturation and theoretical sensitivity (O'Reilly, Paper, & Marx, 2012). When used together these procedures should help assure precision and rigor (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; O'Reilly et al., 2012).

We followed these five GT tenets throughout data collection and the first round of data analysis. However, in the papers we did not refer to these procedures as *grounded theory*, but rather described the procedures with reference to Charmaz (2005), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Eisenhardt (1989). Concepts and categories were identified through the constant comparative method consisting of a simultaneous collection, coding and analysis procedure in which all new data were compared to earlier data and extant theory. We identified concepts that were related and unrelated to the study's initial idea, and integrated categories and their properties while writing memos describing these further. These provisional concepts guided the data collection in the form of probing for more information during the semi-structured interviews while following the interview guide in a flexible

manner (letting the managers answer the questions in their preferred order). The data collection continued toward theoretical saturation, which means the concepts were fully developed in terms of their dimension and properties (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Finally the concepts were integrated into higher order constructs.

After the data had been collected, coded and assembled, key concepts were chosen to represent the building blocks of two separate papers: one attending to the content of leader identities and the other to the development process of leader roles. The data was then reread and recoded with these key concepts and respective literatures in mind and resulted in the final theoretical models presented in the two papers.

GT was chosen as a framework for collecting and analyzing data due to its ability to develop theory that is empirically grounded (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in the hope that the constructed theories may contribute to bridging the gap between the academic and practitioner worlds of leadership (Gordon & Yukl, 2004). Another reason for this choice was the set of prescribed and yet flexible tools that GT offers (Charmaz, 2005) which allow for serendipity and discovery (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). And finally GT procedures provide rigor and transparency to the conceptualization process of codes and so should make the emerging theories more reliable (Wasserman, Clair, & Wilson, 2009).

Despite the strengths of GT there are several challenges that need to be addressed. The first relates to a controversial area within GT concerning whether or not a researcher should enter the field with a *tabula rasa* approach, and whether this is even feasible (Parry, 1998). Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally advised researchers to defer from reading existing theory until data collection and analysis has ended, this may be problematic and have drawbacks such as the possible reinvention of the wheel (the same theory) and perhaps assigning new names to old concepts (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). More recent books on GT argue that knowledge of extant theory is vital (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and argue it is

neither possible nor warranted to enter the research scene without an “interpretive frame of reference” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). Since we agree with this argument, rather than defer from reading up on theory we decided to use extant theories as sensitizing concepts to guide our analysis (Charmaz, 2005) and to follow Suddaby’s advice and draw from several substantive areas of research (a vast variety of role and identity theories) while being aware of their possible influence (Suddaby, 2006).

Another important criticism of GT is that in many instances it is doubtful whether GT does result in theory in the sense that it explains something, or merely results in generating concepts (Bryman, 2012). A way to facilitate insight into relationships between concepts is through a comparison of cases, not only on the conceptual level (like one does during the constant comparative method), but also on a case level (Bryman, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1989). This was the main reason for our chosen multiple case research design (Eisenhardt, 1989). We compared our multiple cases (individual managers and contexts) using within- and cross-case analysis procedures following Eisenhardt (1989). These comparative analyses enabled suggestions for relationships between concepts and resulted in our final theorizing on leader identities (paper 2) and the leader role (paper 3).

Before I introduce the results of the studies that comprise this thesis, I will briefly note how the data employed in papers 2 and 3 differ. Both papers are based on the data provided through the interviews with the 28 senior managers. However, paper 2 excludes data from the military leaders from the data analysis. This data was omitted since there were only two individuals from the military context, which did not allow for a proper comparison across contexts. Furthermore, the two from the military did not meet the selection criteria of being in early role transition and since data collected from 42 additional managers (with the use of an open questionnaire) provided the study with sufficient data for saturation of the leader identity categories, I decided to leave the two military leaders out of the final analysis. However, data

from the military was kept in the analysis of paper 3 since it provided valuable insights on the leader role and the role-crafting strategies, and a comparison across contexts was not as important in this paper.

The decision to collect additional data on leader identity was made after the first round of coding was completed. I was overwhelmed by the many concepts and struck by the large variation in leader identity content across the individual managers and their respective contexts. When an opportunity presented itself to ask a direct question pertaining to leader identity to two groups of managers attending a course on leadership, I hoped that their answers would help me discern a few valuable categories and perhaps provide a clearer pattern of variation across contexts. The short and to-the-point answers offered by these managers made it easy to discover three categories that were consistent across individuals. Once these categories had been discovered I recoded the interview data using these three as a “coding template” (King, 2012, p. 426). The questionnaire answers provided the analysis with a bigger sample and made it possible to compare contexts using cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus the two sets of data complemented each other and provided the final study with a more complete picture of leader identities.

I will now present the three papers starting with an exploration of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool.

CHAPTER 4

PAPER 1

Leadership coaching, leader role efficacy, and trust in subordinates. A mixed methods study
assessing leadership coaching as a leadership development tool

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Leadership coaching, leader role-efficacy, and trust in subordinates. A mixed methods study assessing leadership coaching as a leadership development tool



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ABSTRACT

In this study, we used a two-phase exploratory sequential design consisting of qualitative and quantitative research methods to assess leadership coaching as a leadership development tool. A focus group study combined with a review of theory resulted in hypotheses linking coaching to increased leader role-efficacy (LRE) and leader's trust in subordinates (LTS). Using data from leaders participating in a six month coaching program and a control group, the results showed that LRE and LTS increased in the coaching group, but not in the control group. We also hypothesized that increased trust in subordinates would be related to subordinates' psychological empowerment and turnover intentions. A significant relationship between increased LTS and reduced turnover intentions was found. Finally, we found that the degree of facilitative behavior from the coach positively affected the changes in both leader role-efficacy and trust in subordinates. While the results should be interpreted with caution as the sample is small, our findings support claims that coaching represents a promising leadership development tool. Furthermore, the results regarding trust in subordinates represent contributions to the development of a relational perspective on leadership development.

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Introduction

The development of leaders is an expressed goal in most organizations (Avolio & Hannah, 2009), and leadership development has become "big business" over the last decade (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2010: 13). Given the role that leadership plays in the current malaise around financial crisis, climate control, and ethical debacles, which the media characterizes as a "failure of leadership" (Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Claudia, 2010: 922–958), understanding how to facilitate the development of effective leadership is more crucial than ever. However, systematic investigations of leadership development interventions are rare in the literature (Avolio, Avey, & Quisenberry, 2010), and the practice of leadership development and its scientific foundation are disconnected (Day, 2000: 581). This shortage of systematic investigations and disconnection between theory and practice may result in costly leadership development programs that have unintended or no effects and may slow down the development of theory. Consequently, it is essential that leadership development program components should be evaluated scientifically (Solansky, 2010) with robust theories that can be validated and tested across empirical settings.

Leadership coaching has been presented as a promising leadership development practice (Day, 2000; Ely et al., 2010) and has become a widely used intervention for leadership development (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; Feldman & Lankau,

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2005). Leadership development can be understood as an “integration strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives” (Day, 2000, p. 586). Leadership coaching involves one-on-one counseling of executives, leaders, and managers about work-related issues with the purpose of improving their leadership effectiveness (Ely et al., 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The promising features of leadership coaching may be found in the way that it addresses a traditional challenge in leadership development programs. When leaders enter into a common program, they have differing experiences, skills, and learning styles (Solansky, 2010). Coaching is characterized by a custom-tailored development process (Bono et al., 2009; Grant, 2006) and consequently addresses the challenge of different individual starting points. However, in line with the previously mentioned gaps in the field of leadership development, there is also a lack of systematic evaluation of this particular leadership development tool (Ely et al., 2010). To advance the field theoretically and empirically, rigorous and systematic evaluations of the effects of leadership coaching are needed (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003).

Because of the qualitatively different approach of leadership coaching compared with other leadership development initiatives, traditional training intervention evaluations may be insufficient to address these outcomes (Ely et al., 2010). Hence, Ely et al. (2010) provide a framework for evaluation of leadership coaching and argue that we need both summative evaluation (assessing the effectiveness) and formative evaluation (identifying areas for program improvement) to further our knowledge of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool. Drawing on their framework, the purpose of the present study is to provide summative evaluation in the form of two outcome criteria that are based in theory and practice (leader role-efficacy and trust in subordinates), and formative evaluation investigating how the coach's facilitative behavior may affect these outcome variables.

In order to assess the impact of leadership coaching and to add to the knowledge base of summative evaluation, it is important to determine appropriate outcome criteria (Smither et al., 2003). However, there have been “no universally accepted criteria for what constitutes (a) successful outcome” in leadership coaching (MacKie, 2007: 310). The present study attempts to address this gap by suggesting two generic outcome variables. Because leadership coaching attends to the particular needs of the leaders, one may find that they have a large number of diverse goals and desired outcomes from coaching. We believe that the idiosyncrasy of these different goals should be taken into account when determining appropriate outcome criteria. At the same time, we need generic outcome variables based in theory that may be measured as a difference in state before and after coaching and across studies. We suggest that coaching may increase a leader's general feeling of mastery of his/her role, and we refer to this outcome as leader role efficacy (LRE). LRE may be defined as “a leader's confidence judgment in his/her ability to carry out the behaviors that comprise the leadership role” (Paglis, 2010: 772). This implies that the leaders (rather than the researchers) may determine the vital elements of their particular leadership role, to the degree that they have confidence in their abilities to attend to these, and may set their individual goals for coaching accordingly. We argue that LRE represents an outcome variable that addresses the idiosyncratic nature of leaders' coaching goals and is generic enough to be compared before and after coaching, and across leaders.

LRE may be a sufficient goal in itself for individual leaders attending a coaching program. However, the effectiveness of a leadership program should also be judged according to changes experienced by the subordinates. Thus, in addition to LRE, we suggest that coaching may improve the quality of the relationship between a leader and his/her subordinates by increasing a leader's trust in his or her subordinates (LTS). Trust may contribute to strengthening the psychosocial function of the leader-subordinate relationship (as opposed to the instrumental function) and thereby may improve subordinates' perceptions of competence and effectiveness, as well as their willingness to continue their working relationship (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blame, 2006). We therefore suggest that leadership coaching will have an effect on the subordinates in terms of increased psychological empowerment and reduced turnover intention. The present study develops and tests hypotheses on these expected outcomes. Furthermore, responding to the call for formative measures that may provide prescriptive information to improve coaching (Ely et al., 2010: 591), we investigate how the coach's facilitative behavior will affect the outcomes of leadership coaching. In line with the framework of Ely et al. (2010) as well as a large body of literature on coaching, we suggest that facilitative coach behavior (challenge, support, and feedback) impacts on learning outcomes.

The objective of the study is first to contribute to substantive theory building on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool. We suggest that LRE and LTS should be included in conceptual models of leadership coaching effectiveness. Second, we contribute empirically to the field of leadership development and leadership coaching through a rigorous test of the outcomes of coaching as well as antecedents to coaching effectiveness. Finally, we aim to generate knowledge that may benefit practitioners and human resource managers responsible for leadership development in their organization.

The study was conducted in several steps using a mixed methods design in which elements of qualitative and quantitative research methods were combined (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). A two-phase exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) was chosen to address different research questions: What generic outcome criteria should be used to assess the effect of leadership coaching? Does leadership coaching have a positive effect on these outcome criteria? To what extent do differences in facilitative coach behavior influence this effect? An additional reason for choosing this research design was that it enables a more comprehensive account of leadership as a leadership development tool. In the first part of our study, we conducted a focus group discussion with experienced coaches to provide us with valuable outcome variables that were based in both practice and theory. Second, we conducted a quasi-experimental field study with leaders who attended a six-month coaching program and their subordinates. We gathered pre- and posttest measures from the intervention group (hereafter referred to as the “coaching group”) and a control group, each group including both leaders and subordinates. In the second step,

we tested the effects of the coaching program on the outcome variables that were revealed in the first part of our study (LRE and LTS) and compared the coaching group with the control group. Third, we investigated changes in subordinates' psychological empowerment and turnover intentions, and their association with changes in the leaders' trust. Fourth, we conducted regression analyses on the coaching group of 24 leaders, regressing LRE and LTS on the coach's facilitative behavior (controlling for the variance at T1) to test the effects of the coach's behavior on the outcome variables. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to assess the outcome of leadership coaching with a mixed methods design comprising a focus group study and a quasi-experimental field study, including pre–post-test and control group design, and multisource data.

Literature review and hypotheses

Leadership coaching

Leadership coaching is coaching of executives, leaders, and managers. It is a formal one-on-one relationship that involves counseling about work-related issues with the purpose of improving their leadership effectiveness (Ely et al., 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The terms “executive coaching” and “leadership coaching” are often used interchangeably. “Executive coaching” is the most commonly used term (Baron & Morin, 2009, 2010; Baron, Morin, & Morin, 2011; Bono et al., 2009; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009; Joo, 2005; MacKie, 2007; Moen & Skaalvik, 2009; Smither et al., 2003). Only a few studies such as Boyce, Jackson, and Neal (2010) and Ely et al. (2010) refer to coaching of leaders as “leadership coaching”. However, as executive coaching may address a variety of issues including mental health, resilience, workplace well-being, stress and depression (Grant et al., 2009), and because we are interested in outcome variables that more directly address leadership effectiveness, we prefer the term “leadership coaching”. Furthermore, we take a relational perspective on leadership and conceptualize it as “embedded in the everyday relationally-responsive dialogical practices of leaders” (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1426). Despite a wide range of theoretical coaching frameworks from behavioral and cognitive to psychodynamic focused and solution focused, coaching is defined by a common set of principles: “collaboration and accountability, awareness raising, responsibility, commitment, action planning and action” (Grant et al., 2009: 397). Another hallmark for leadership coaching is the strong focus on goal-directed interaction (e.g., Burke & Linley, 2007; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Joo, 2005; Spence & Oades, 2011; Sue-Chan, Wood, & Latham, 2010). The unique nature of leadership coaching lies in the way that it attends to the particular needs of the leaders and their respective organizations, and the flexible individualized process, to achieve the desired results (Bono et al., 2009; Ely et al., 2010; Smither et al., 2003). Although the coaching process is custom tailored to the individual, it involves certain core elements: assessment (feedback), challenge, and support (Bono et al., 2009; Ely et al., 2010; Grant et al., 2009; Tobias, 1996). Coaching has been found to have a positive effect after only one coaching session (Burke & Linley, 2007). However, the number of coaching sessions received has been found to be positively and significantly associated with the leaders' posttraining self-efficacy when controlling for pretraining self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2010). Thus, when coaching is used for leadership development purposes, it usually involves several coaching sessions (e.g., Moen & Skaalvik, 2009; Smither et al., 2003).

The growing body of literature on leadership coaching has largely taken the practitioner perspective, and academic research on leadership coaching has lagged far behind (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Among practitioner evaluations of the effectiveness of coaching, it has been popular to measure effect as return on investment (ROI) (Linley, 2006; MacKie, 2007). The reported financial numbers in these studies have been very high, which argues for the use of coaching. An example of such a study is McGovern et al. (2001), who claim that leadership coaching has an ROI of 545%. Another one is a study by Olivero, Bane, and Kopelman (1997), in which 31 managers received coaching for two months as a transfer-of-learning tool and reported an average increase in productivity after training alone of 22.4%, and after both training and coaching a stunning increase of 88% (Olivero et al., 1997). However, both McGovern et al.'s (2001) and Olivero et al.'s (1997) findings should be treated with caution as the figures were collected only after the coaching intervention was effectuated. Such a retrospective approach to evaluation risks a number of biases such as recall errors (Grant et al., 2009). Unfortunately, this kind of research design with posttest only has been typical for many coaching studies, and the results are potentially erroneous. There are relatively few longitudinal leadership coaching studies using a pre–post and control group design (Grant, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010). A literature review conducted in 2008 by Grant et al. (2009) found 42 empirical studies examining the effects of leadership coaching interventions, out of which only 11 used a within-subjects design (pre–post test) and three used a between-subjects quasi-experimental design.

Among the rigorously designed coaching outcome studies, we have a study by Luthans and Peterson (2003). Using a single-group, pre–post within-group design, they found that a combination of 360-degree feedback and systematic coaching focused on enhancing self-awareness and behavioral management resulted in improved manager and employee satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions (Luthans & Peterson, 2003). Using a quasi-experimental pre–post control group design, Smither et al. (2003) explored how coaching would enhance the impact of 360-degree feedback. Out of the 1361 senior managers participating in the study, 404 received coaching. The managers who worked with a coach improved more than the other managers in terms of direct report and supervisor ratings; however, the effect size ($d = .17$) was small. Smither et al. (2003) suggested that a reason for the small effect size could be that their measurement tool was too broad to detect the impact of coaching. They proposed that future research should determine more appropriate outcome criteria and suggested the use of more individualized criteria such as, e.g., progress toward specific self-set goals (Smither et al., 2003).

Individualized outcome criteria of coaching are addressed in studies by Grant and colleagues. The results of coaching were significant progress toward self-set goals (Grant, 2003), enhanced goal striving, well-being, and hope (Green, Oades, & Grant,

2006). The first to use a randomized pre–post-test and control group design with leadership coaching were Grant et al. (2009). They found that a combination of 360-degree feedback and a cognitive–behavioral solution-focused approach to coaching had a positive effect on the participants' goal-achievement, resilience, and well-being. Another pre–post-test and control group coaching study investigating individualized outcome criteria found significant changes in self-efficacy, goal setting, intrapersonal causal attributions, and need satisfaction (Moen & Skaalvik, 2009). Despite a growing number of well-designed studies in the field of leadership coaching, more systematic evaluations containing appropriate criteria that link theory and practice are needed to further our knowledge of this fairly new leadership development tool (Baron et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2010).

While summative evaluation may indicate *whether* the coaching process has produced its effects, formative evaluation is equally important as it addresses *what* helped to cause these effects, helping “refine and improve the coaching intervention” (Ely et al., 2010: 591). Rigorously designed studies that provide both formative evaluation and summative evaluation are warranted, yet to date they have been almost nonexistent (Baron & Morin, 2010; Ely et al., 2010; Smither et al., 2003). An extensive search in the PsycINFO database in January 2013 revealed only four studies of this kind: one by Boyce et al. (2010), two by Baron and Morin (2009, 2010), and one by Baron et al. (2011). Boyce et al. (2010) found that relationship processes of rapport, trust, and commitment positively predict coaching program outcomes in terms of satisfaction and utility of coaching. Baron and Morin (2009) assessed the coach–client dyads. The coach–client relationship was found to play a mediating role between the number of coaching sessions received and the development of the leaders' self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2009). Finally, Baron et al. (2011) tested the effect of working alliance discrepancy (over/underestimating the working alliance) on the leaders' self-efficacy growth, but their hypothesis that underestimating the working alliance would lead to more self-efficacy growth was not supported. These studies are a first step toward understanding the elements that may increase the effectiveness of leadership coaching. More studies are needed to further the advancement of what seems to be a valuable leadership development tool.

Defining variables through focus group discussion

Two important objectives of the present study were to reveal appropriate generic outcome variables and to investigate whether coaching produced these wanted outcomes. As leadership coaching is a fairly new field in need of theory development, we chose an explorative method to help determine outcome criteria that could be developed further with the use of related theory. There have been calls for “scientist–practitioner dialog” to help develop a common knowledge base on coaching outcomes (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007: 252). To address this call for dialog and to gain new insight into what could be appropriate criteria, we invited the participating coaches to discuss their experiences. Out of the seven coaches in the project, we were able to gather five for a two-hour discussion. We decided to use a focus group as it can be particularly useful for a comprehensive elucidation of ideas, opinions, and understandings that are difficult to obtain in individual interviews (Wilkinson, 2008). Furthermore, it is a method for efficient data collection when there is a focused topic that can be discussed.

One researcher served as the moderator and took notes during the discussion, while the other researcher observed and took notes, which provided two sets of notes to compare during our analysis. In accordance with recommendations in the literature (Krueger, 1997), the group was quite homogeneous, and the moderator was well acquainted with the topic. In line with recommendations for focus group research, we had a conversational approach to facilitate the discussion (Krueger, 1997). We had no predefined outcomes in mind when entering the focus group but were attentive toward reflections on typical goals and goal attainment. We began with a general question to encourage the participants to share experiences and opinions: “What goals are typically expressed by your clients at the start of the coaching period?” We then had follow-up questions to elaborate on the discussion as well as to encourage disagreements to be expressed and discussed (Smithson, 2010). The general reply was that the goals were closely related to the present job situation of the client (the names of the focus group participants are pseudonyms):

Ida: If I am contacted by a client directly, it is often because they are in a difficult situation; for example, an organizational change or a negotiation with their supervisors. In those cases, their goals are to master this situation.

Rikke: I often have clients that have negotiated funding from their employer as a developmental effort to improve their leadership skills in general. But when we meet, I realize that there is often a specific problem they want to solve.

Ruby: My impression is that the reason for wanting coaching is that they have general problems in mastering their leadership role.

As the group elaborated further on these initial goals, we learned that goals usually change over the coaching period.

Helga: Goals always change during the coaching relationship, so the goals stated initially by the client are seldom relevant later.

Grete: I once coached a client out of her job, so the initial explicit goals were obviously not the “real” goal.

Helga: I have done that several times: coached a person into another job.

We then asked what induced these changes in goals, and the following discussion indicated that the changes were related to increased awareness obtained through the coaching sessions.

Rikke: When we dig into their specific problems in the job, the focus is on increased awareness of how the leader her/himself is related to the problems. It is a lot about how they are affected by their job environments and how they impact on their environments.

Helga: We ask “what is the real problem” because our job is to make our clients see and understand the complexity of their role.

Grete: And they gain an increased awareness of their relationship to their subordinates.

Rikke: This is also my experience. Clients may complain about the employees, and they become aware that as leaders, they are part of the problem. Sometimes the reason for subordinates not taking responsibility is lack of delegation from the leader. How can you demand trust from your employees if you do not trust them?

It appeared that this development of awareness of oneself and the job situation gradually led to a new perspective on goals.

Grete: The general goal over time develops and revolves around how to thrive and master the job. If the clients experience mastery, they are able to tackle the specific problems they had at the start of the process.

Rikke: Yes, and the process to get there is at the core of the coaching. Mastery is the goal.

Moderator: And how can you describe this mastery: what is it about?

Rikke: It is a belief that one can handle problems when they arise.

Grete: I also think it is about being proactive, which is another side of the same thing: that you do not sit and wait until other people take initiative; you grasp issues at once when they come to your attention.

Helga: And at the same time, it is about knowing when to take initiative and when to sit back and rely on your subordinates to take responsibility. Insecure leaders are often “control freaks”, and they may do a better job when they can loosen up their control and delegate more often.

The coaches agreed that goals change during the coaching process as a consequence of self-reflection and greater self-awareness. A leader may typically start out with a specific goal such as becoming better at delegating tasks. As the coaching evolves, the leader becomes aware of his unconscious values (e.g., quality, control, and consideration). He realizes that the challenge of delegation is linked to his need for quality and control, and reluctance to bother others. A consequence of this new insight is a change of goals toward tolerating lower levels of quality and letting go of some control. The result of this new goal may be more delegation but now on a deeper level. According to the coaches, as the leaders become aware of their values, strengths, and weaknesses, and experiment with new behavior, they become more proactive, agential, and self-confident. The leaders often refer to this overall feeling as “mastering their leader role”.

Two valuable and appropriate outcome criteria for evaluating coaching effectiveness stood out from the focus group discussion: confidence in one’s ability to be an effective leader, and confidence in subordinates’ ability to take on responsibility. Searching for relevant theories to address these two kinds of confidence, we found confidence in oneself to be similar to definitions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) as well as leadership efficacy (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010). Confidence in others, we believe, is reflected by the leaders’ trust in subordinates (LTS) (Spreitzer and Mishra (1999)). In the following paragraphs, we argue that leader role-efficacy (LRE) and LTS are generic outcome criteria that should be evaluated when assessing the effects of leadership coaching, and we present hypotheses about why coaching will influence these.

Leader role-efficacy

Albert Bandura’s (1997) construct of self-efficacy refers to “an individual’s confidence about his/her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998: 66). Recently, self-efficacy beliefs have been connected to the domain of leadership and are referred to as leader self-efficacy (LSE) (Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin, & Jackson, 2008; Paglis, 2010). This is a natural link as research on self-efficacy has found that efficacy beliefs contribute to a strengthening of effort toward action and perseverance in the face of obstacles, both of which are vital behaviors for leaders (Anderson et al., 2008; Paglis, 2010). LSE may be defined broadly as leaders’ confidence in their ability to perform the behaviors that make up the leadership role (Paglis, 2010). There have been attempts at developing more fine-grained taxonomies and measures of this construct (e.g., Anderson et al., 2008; Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000). An example of this is the taxonomy developed by Anderson et al. (2008) based on identifications of the behaviors that constitute effective leadership. However, given the lack of consensus in the literature on what leadership really is, it is no surprise that researchers diverge at the level of specificity in their approaches to studying LSE (Paglis, 2010). Rather than attempt to present an extensive list of effective leadership behaviors to measure LSE, we adopt a *generalized* level of leader self-efficacy, which we label leader role-efficacy (LRE). We define LRE as the leaders’ awareness of, and confidence in, their abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to master the tasks involved in their leader role successfully. We argue that LRE is similar to LSE yet is a less behavior-specific construct, thus enabling comparison of leaders across different organizational contexts and hierarchical levels as these will need to exhibit different leadership behaviors to be effective (Conger & Fishel, 2007; Day & Sin, 2011). Although literature on LSE and task-specific LSE may relate to different leader behaviors in the literature, we present them together in the following literature review.

There are strong indications of the salience of LSE as instrumental to leadership performance. Chemers et al. (2000) found that leadership efficacy was strongly related to leadership performance ratings. This is in line with Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, and Avolio (2011), who found that leader efficacy predicted rated leader performance. Anderson et al. (2008) found similar results that relate leader efficacy on specific tasks to aspects of the leadership role. Furthermore, the leaders’ confidence in their ability to perform well in their leadership role may influence employee engagement and perceived leader effectiveness (Luthans & Peterson, 2003). We argue that having efficacy beliefs relating to one’s leader role also has merit in itself as a psychological state that leaders aspire to and strive for, as reflected in the focus group discussion.

Leader self-efficacy has been shown to have strong personality correlates, prompting a discussion of its trait- vs. state-like properties (Hannah et al., 2008; Paglis, 2010). Although scarce, there are empirical indications of organizational contextual antecedents to LSE

(Paglis & Green, 2002), and we argue that LRE can be developed systematically with the use of leadership coaching. Successful accomplishments, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion are important elements that have been found to facilitate the development of the individual's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These are strategies incorporated into the typical coaching methodology (Gjerde, 2003). During the coaching process, the leaders will set goals and break these down into smaller and more manageable steps (Finn, Mason, & Bradley, 2007). They will be challenged into action and new perspectives (Neenan & Dryden, 2002), and they will reflect upon ways to use their strengths to address challenges that they meet (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). Leadership coaching should facilitate their mastery experience and consequently augment their efficacy beliefs related to their overall leader role responsibilities.

Studies investigating the effect of leadership coaching on efficacy beliefs found that coaching had a positive effect on the leaders' confidence in performing transformational and transactional leadership (Finn et al., 2007), leadership capabilities predefined by the participating leaders (Moen & Skaalvik, 2009) and supervisory coaching behavior skills (Baron & Morin, 2010), in addition to setting their own goals compared with a control group (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006). Neither of these studies refers to the self-efficacy beliefs as "leader efficacy". The only study that we found linking an individualized intervention to leader efficacy was one by Lester et al. (2011), who found a positive relationship between mentoring and leader efficacy. They argue that highly customized leadership development practices should be especially effective in enhancing leader efficacy (measured as self-regulation and action in relation to various leadership behaviors) (Lester et al., 2011). Based upon our focus group findings, theoretical reasoning, and previous empirical results, we argue that LRE represents an appropriate outcome variable that should be measured when assessing coaching effectiveness, and we expect a positive relationship; hence, the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Leadership coaching will positively influence leader role-efficacy.

Trust in subordinates

Recent developments in leadership theory suggest that leadership is produced and enabled by relational processes (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Relational leadership theory offers a view of leadership as a mutual influence process between leaders and subordinates as well as other organizational actors, where organizational practices are shaped through dialog and interaction. For example, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) illustrate relational leading as "the need to be respectful, establish trust, and for people to be able to express themselves". In accordance with this view, we suggest that leaders' confidence in their subordinates' competence and abilities is crucial for relational leadership to take place. For mutual influence processes to evolve, leaders need to trust their subordinates enough to delegate responsibility and to provide them with the experience of autonomy and competence, both of which are "essential for optimal functioning in a broad range of highly varied cultures" (Deci & Ryan, 2008: 183). A leader's trust in subordinates (LTS) is regarded as a crucial element of a high-quality leader-subordinate relationship (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). There are also empirical indications that trust between a leader and his/her subordinates, is reciprocal in nature such that LTS may facilitate reciprocal trust from the subordinates (Serva, Fuller, & Mayer, 2005).

However, despite an extensive body of literature on trust in leader-subordinate relationships, LTS has received little attention as virtually all studies address subordinates' trust in their leader (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). In a review of literature on trust across levels in organizations, Fulmer and Gelfand (2012: 1214) reported that there were not sufficient studies of trust in subordinates to do a proper theory review. One of the few empirical studies that directly address the leader's trust in employees is Spreitzer and Mishra (1999). They reported that trust in employees could act as a substitute for control as trust in employees was positively related to managerial involvement of employees in decision making and that higher levels of managerial involvement of employees were positively associated with organizational performance. Trust is commonly defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another (Rousseau et al., 1998). The antecedents to trust are an assessment of other peoples' trustworthiness and one's own willingness to take risks (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). The willingness to take risks has been argued to be based on a trait such as general propensity to trust (Mayer et al., 1995) or propensity to relate (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000). We suggest that a leader's propensity to trust subordinates in specific contexts can be a state developed through experience, specifically through reciprocal interaction between leader and subordinates.

In order to advance theory and research on this issue, we propose that leadership coaching impacts not only on LRE but also on trust in subordinates. We argue that as leaders develop a general sense of role efficacy, they will increase their confidence in subordinates, as well as a willingness to take risks and be vulnerable in the sense of "giving up control" (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). Thus, based on the abovementioned arguments and previous empirical findings, we propose that leadership coaching will influence LTS, as coaching may facilitate the leader's willingness to engage in risk-taking behavior through sharing authority and delegating responsibilities; hence, the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. Leadership coaching will influence leaders' trust in subordinates.

Subordinate outcomes

We propose two types of attitudinal outcomes that we believe will be influenced by the leaders' increased trust in subordinates: psychological empowerment and turnover intention. Psychological empowerment is chosen as an outcome variable based on the argument that if a leader is willing to increase his/her vulnerability and delegate tasks and responsibilities,

this will lead to increased participative decision making that the subordinates may perceive as a larger degree of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). However, because this effect may take longer to produce than the six-month period of our study, we also include a more immediate outcome variable; namely, turnover intention. Turnover intention is an emotional state where an employee is seriously considering leaving the job, often associated with unsatisfactory work environments or job conditions (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007; Yue, Ooi, & Keong, 2011). We suggest that an improved relationship between a leader and his/her subordinate, which increased trust indicates, could be reflected in a stronger intention by the subordinate to stay in the organization. A recent, unpublished study in Norway revealed that among 289 respondents that had changed their job during the previous three years, 32% reported that the reason for quitting their job was their managers' behavior, either their immediate supervisor or the general management in the company.¹ Research has also demonstrated an association between the quality of the employee–organization relationship (EOR) and voluntary turnover (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010; Kuvaas, 2008).

The small amount of research on LTS in the literature makes our hypothesis on how trust relates to subordinate outcomes rather explorative. Whether changes in a leader's attitudes toward subordinates first are manifested in the leader's direct behavior toward the subordinates, then are apprehended by subordinates, and finally result in changes of their attitudes or motivations, is not self-evident. Yet based on the abovementioned arguments, theoretical reasoning and empirical findings, we suggest the following hypothesis on subordinate outcomes.

Hypothesis 3. A leader's increased trust in his/her subordinates is associated with (a) an increase in the subordinates' psychological empowerment and (b) a decrease in their turnover intentions.

Coach behavior

In addition to providing summative evaluation of the effects of leadership coaching, the objective of this study was to indicate what formative evaluation may contribute to prediction and explanation of the outcome. Ely et al. (2010) suggest that certain components of the coaching process, such as assessment, challenge, and support, are factors that may be valuable for this purpose. We take them up on their suggestion, but instead of addressing challenge and support as process elements, we define these as coach behaviors that should facilitate the leaders' goal achievement. Instead of "assessment", we suggest *feedback* as part of facilitative coach behavior. Hall, Otazo, and Hollenbeck (1999) interviewed 75 executives and found that they valued honest, realistic, and challenging feedback as an important factor of coaching effectiveness. Feedback is used in different ways throughout the coaching process: as a starting point to set goals and to identify areas for behavior change, and as a benchmark and a way to evaluate progress, in addition to dictating the nature of the coach–client relationship (Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers, 2008). Because of its vital role in the coaching process, feedback is regularly mentioned as a requisite coaching competency in leadership coaching (Ely et al., 2010; Gregory et al., 2008; Hall et al., 1999; Heslin, Vandewalle, & Latham, 2006). Thus, we argue that facilitative coach behavior will involve feedback.

The ability to *challenge* the leader is another core coaching skill (e.g., Ely et al., 2010). The coach challenges the leaders to set goals, to make action plans, to initiate action, and to reassume action when experiencing relapse or procrastination, in addition to challenging their perspectives and cognitive structures to facilitate learning (e.g., Grant, 2006; Neenan & Dryden, 2002). We suggest that challenge is part of facilitative coach behavior. Finally, we suggest that facilitative coach behavior involves *support*. Providing the leaders with support toward the attainment of their goals during what may be a challenging endeavor has been suggested as the coach's main responsibility (e.g., Baron et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2010). Support may be given in various ways from empathetic and active listening to provide a safe and nonjudgmental space for reflection, to active championing and a structure that helps uphold focus and persistence (Gjerde, 2003).

As previously mentioned, the few empirical leadership coaching studies that investigate self-efficacy as an outcome variable find a positive relation between coaching and postintervention self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2010; Evers et al., 2006; Finn et al., 2007; Moen & Skaalvik, 2009). Baron and Morin (2010) found that the higher the number of coaching sessions, the greater the changes in self-efficacy. We argue that facilitative coach behavior represents an additional active mechanism in the coaching process that will help explain and predict changes in leader role efficacy. During the coaching process, in which the coach challenges, supports, and provides the leader with feedback, the coach will persuade the leader into action and thus enable the leader to gain new experience to learn from. As coaches hold a solution- and resource-oriented mind-set (Gjerde, 2003), they will encourage the leaders to reflect upon their successful accomplishments stemming from new and previous experiences, and to look to others to learn from vicarious experience. As these strategies have been found to enhance a person's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997), we expect that facilitative coach behavior will affect leader role-efficacy.

Hypothesis 4. Facilitative coach behavior will affect leader role-efficacy positively.

Facilitative coach behavior should also influence the leaders' trust in their subordinates. As argued earlier, before trusting others, individuals will assess the other persons' trustworthiness along with their own willingness to take risks (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Schoorman et al., 2007; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). We argue that a leader's propensity to trust subordinates in specific contexts can be a state that may be developed through experience initiated by, and reflected upon during, the coaching process. We believe that the general principles of coaching—agency, accountability, and responsibility (Grant et al., 2009)—will influence how the leaders come to assess not only themselves but also their subordinates. A natural consequence should be that

¹ www.fourstep.no.

the leaders put more trust in their subordinates. We suggest that the influence of these principles on leaders' propensity to trust subordinates will be stronger when the coach displays high levels of facilitative coach behavior, which gives us the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5. Facilitative coach behavior will affect trust in subordinates positively.

Method

Participants and procedures

The second part of this study was a field experiment chosen to test the propositions and hypotheses developed in the first part of the study. The objective was to reveal the effect of coaching on LRE and LTS compared with a control group (between-group analysis) and whether changes in trust had any effect on subordinates, and to test whether facilitative coach behavior would predict variation in the two leader outcome variables (within-group analysis). We collaborated with a small coaching company that invited coaches from their network into the project. In total, seven experienced leadership coaches volunteered to participate, all trained in Co-Active Coaching and International Coach Federation (ICF) certified. Co-Active Coaching is a solution-focused, strength- and resource-centered, action- and learning-oriented methodology (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 2007). The coaching program comprised eight sessions, each lasting between one and one-and-a-half hours. The intake session lasted an hour and a half, and addressed the leaders' core values, the objectives of the coaching process, and the coaching relation. The following sessions started with the leaders setting the agenda and reflecting upon learning from the last session's homework, before current challenges in the leader role were discussed and/or objectives set in the intake session were attended to. A typical subject of reflection among the leaders was delegation and how to let go of operational tasks to leave more room for strategic tasks and support of the subordinates' development. Another characteristic coaching topic was figuring out who they were and "should" be in their leader role, and finding the right balance between complying with subordinates', peers' and superiors' expectations and feeling authentic. The coaches listened actively with curiosity and self-management, facilitating learning and action. Furthermore, the coaches made use of three distinct methodologies: fulfillment, balance, and process, which are fully described by Whitworth, Kinsey-House, Sandahl, and Whitmore (1998).

The participating leaders were leaders at middle and upper levels in their organizations. They were invited to the study through invitations sent to the coaches' client organizations and were offered coaching over a period of six months. The organizations that signed a contract to participate in the study received a reduced price for the program. The contract obliged the participating organizations to provide the researchers with participating leaders, corresponding leaders for a control group, and at least five subordinates that reported directly to each leader. All the participants were obligated to reply to a survey before and after the coaching period of six months. As coaching requires effort and commitment on behalf of the participating leaders, the invitation made it explicit that we preferred self-selection of leaders to the program. For each participating leader, the employers were to recruit a corresponding leader from their organization with similar responsibilities and authority level for the control group. Our objective was to control for the impact of possible events in the organization that could bias the results. Twenty-seven leaders volunteered for coaching. Unfortunately, the organizations were only able to provide seven corresponding leaders for the control group, either because their organization was too small to have several leaders in similar positions or because the potential participants in the control group declined to spend the time and effort required. In total, 34 leaders were recruited into the project.

The leader questionnaire developed during the first part of the study was distributed to the 34 participants one week before the coaching sessions started. Four of the participants did not respond, despite two reminders. After the six-month period of coaching ended, a follow-up questionnaire was sent to the 30 participants who replied in the first round. Of these, six did not respond, and the final sample included 24 participating leaders, which represents a response rate of 73%. Of the seven participants in the control group, six responded at both times. The final control group comprised six leaders.

From the participating organizations, we received 192 email addresses to subordinates, to which we distributed a questionnaire at the same points of time as we did to the leaders. We then matched the subordinates to their leaders, a process that shrank the sample considerably. First, we excluded responses from subordinates who did not respond at both times, and then we excluded those who were assigned to leaders that did not respond at both times. The resulting final sample of subordinates comprised 80 respondents, of which 63 belonged to the coaching group of leaders. The number of subordinates per leader in the final sample ranged from two to seven, with an average of 2.7 per leader.

Measures

Leader role efficacy (LRE)

As previously mentioned, we decided to address a general form of leader efficacy and adopted the leadership role level of specificity (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Chemers et al., 2000; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010). The two most commonly used measures of leader self-efficacy are those of Murphy (1992) and Paglis and Green (2002). However, these measures do not reflect general role efficacy but rather specific behaviors; Murphy labels her measure "task-specific self-esteem", and Paglis and Green develop a measure that is meant to "reflect managers' judgment of their capabilities for leading change" (Paglis & Green, 2002, p. 225).

Hence, we developed a measure of LRE specifically for this study. Aiming to follow Bandura's (1997, 2001) theory of self-efficacy, we related the items to agency, self-reflectiveness, and confidence in general leadership tasks. We developed five statements reflecting a unidimensional, overall leader role efficacy: "I feel I master every aspect of my job as a leader in an excellent manner", "I am well aware of the strengths I have in my job", "I am very goal oriented in my job as a leader", "I take action to handle a problem as soon as it is brought to my attention", and "I feel confident when I make decisions". Following Hannah et al.'s suggestion that leader efficacy can be portrayed along a continuum of levels (Hannah et al., 2008: 675), the response format was a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated strong internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .94. The reliability score for leader role efficacy was based on the total sample ($N = 30$) at baseline (before coaching, T1).

Leader' trust in subordinates (LTS)

In this study, LTS is defined as manifested by the assessment of another person's trustworthiness and willingness to be vulnerable through transferring authority or delegating tasks and responsibilities to subordinates. This is in line with earlier studies (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Schoorman et al., 2007; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999) and is similar to the definition of Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) (however, the latter measured trust solely as a perception of the employees' trustworthiness). To measure LTS, we applied two items based on earlier measures that focus directly on the truster's willingness to be vulnerable (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 1996), and two items intended to capture subordinates' trustworthiness regarding agential behavior (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006). The four items measuring trust were: "My subordinates will always act responsibly to solve problems occurring in their job", "My subordinates would always take responsibility if I were not able to attend to a situation", "If I were absent for a period of time, I would not hesitate to leave the responsibility to some of my subordinates", and "I often entrust tasks to my subordinates without involving myself". The two latter items should capture the leaders' perceptions that he/she *actually* is engaged in risk-taking behavior and is thus a stronger indication of actual trusting behavior than the mere willingness as a speculation (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006). The response format was a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The four-item scale showed a Cronbach's alpha of .89. The reliability score for trust was based on the total sample ($N = 30$) at baseline (before coaching, T1). Finally, we included three control variables in the analysis of the leader sample: the assigned coach (every coach worked with several leaders), gender, and leader's tenure in present job.

Empowerment and turnover intention

For the measure of subordinates' psychological empowerment, we adopted the items from Spreitzer's (1995) study. This measure comprises twelve items, grouped in four dimensions: meaning, self-determination, impact and competence (Spreitzer, 1995, p. 1465). A factor analysis (direct oblimin), performed on a separate survey ($N = 195$) to validate our new measure, confirmed the four dimensions of the concept. The alpha scores for meaning, self-determination, impact and competence were .78, .70, .76 and .55, respectively ($N = 80$).

We measured turnover intention by five items adopted from Kuvaas (2008), on a five-point Likert scale (Kuvaas, 2008; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). An example item was: "I often think about quitting in my present job". The alpha score for turnover intention was .92.

Facilitative coach behavior

Facilitative coach behavior was measured using three direct questions: "To what degree did the coach challenge you/support you/give you feedback throughout the coaching program?" The response format was a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (to a great extent). The scale provided a Cronbach's alpha score of .88 and was assessed using the subsample of participants that received coaching ($N = 24$), measured six months after baseline (T2).

Validation of measures

To validate our measures of LRE and LTS, we conducted a separate survey. A questionnaire was sent to a total of 195 leaders in two financial institutions. We included the items developed for this study to measure leader role efficacy and trust, in addition to previously validated measures of efficacy (labeled task-specific self-esteem) (Murphy, 1992) and trust in subordinates (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). We received 120 completed questionnaires, a response rate of 47%. To test for discriminant validity between LTS and LRE, we conducted a factor analysis (varimax rotation). The analysis yielded a pattern of two factors, where each item had a factor loading above .57, and a cross loading below .33. The alpha for LRE was .70, and the alpha for LTS was .57. The correlation between these two concepts was .17 ($p = .06$). These results indicate that LRE and LTS are two separate constructs.

To assess the convergent validity of LRE and LTS, we correlated each construct with the previously validated measures of similar constructs. The correlation between our trust construct and the construct developed by Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) was .59 ($p < .01$), and the correlation between our role efficacy construct and the task-related self-esteem construct developed by Murphy (1992) was .38 ($p < .01$). In sum, these results indicate satisfactory discriminant and convergent validity for our self-developed constructs of LRE and LTS.

Results

In our final sample, six of the leaders were top managers, 21 were middle managers, and three had other management positions, such as project manager. The respondents in both groups were equally divided between women and men. About 85%

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variables	Alpha	Mean	S.D.	Efficacy1	Efficacy2	Trust1	Trust2
Leader efficacy T1 (N = 30)	.90	3.81	1.76				
Leader efficacy T2 (N = 30)	.90	5.17	1.38	-.38*			
Trust T1 (N = 30)	.89	3.72	1.78	.81**	-.18		
Trust T2 (N = 30)	.78	5.30	1.19	.39*	.79**	-.22	
Facilitative coach behavior (N = 24)	.88	3.12	.73		.56**		.48*

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

had between 6 and 30 direct subordinates. A majority of the respondents were between 40 and 49 years old, and their average tenure in their present position was a little over two years. Sixty-six percent of the leaders worked in the public sector, 20% in the private sector and 14% in other sectors, such as NGOs. The average size of the organizations in which they worked was 500 employees. There were no differences between the coaching group and the control group on any of these characteristics.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

The descriptive statistics and correlations of LRE, LTS, and facilitative coach behavior are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the strongest correlations are between LTS and LRE at similar points in time. It is also worth noting that LTS is not related across time, indicating that changes have occurred in this variable during the coaching period. Facilitative coach behavior is, for obvious reasons, assessed and correlated only at time 2, once the leaders have experienced the coaches' behaviors.

Testing of hypotheses

We hypothesized that participation in the coaching program would be associated with increased levels of LRE (Hypothesis 1) and increased levels of LTS (Hypothesis 2). To test these hypotheses, we performed independent-samples *t*-tests comparing the means in the two groups at baseline and at time 2. Ideally, in a field experiment, the participants should be randomly assigned to coaching and control groups, and the baseline score of the dependent variable should be similar across groups to present a proper counterfactual with which to compare and to help rule out alternative causal explanations. However, the analysis showed that the coaching group had substantially lower levels of both LRE and LTS at baseline than the control group. A similar pattern of baseline measures across the control and coaching groups has been found in previous field experiment studies on coaching and mentoring (Lester et al., 2011; Moen & Skaalvik, 2009). The mean level of LRE for our coaching group was 3.26 on a seven-point scale, and 6.03 for the control group at baseline (Table 2). The difference in means was significant ($t = 4.04, p = 0.00$) at time 1. At time 2, the mean level of LRE was 4.96 for the coaching group and 6.03 for the control group, and the difference in means was no longer significant ($t = 1.73, p = 0.09$), implying that a significant increase had occurred in the coaching group, which supports Hypothesis 1.

Fig. 1 illustrates how the significant difference in means for LRE between the two groups at time 1 is no longer significant as the coaching group catches up to their level at time 2.

A similar pattern of change from time 1 to time 2 was found in relation to LTS. As Table 2 shows, the mean level of trust was significantly different across groups at time 1 ($t = 5.21, p = 0.00$), but at time 2, the difference between the two groups was no longer significant ($t = 1.84, p = 0.07$). This supports Hypothesis 2 and implies that participation in the coaching program would lead to increased levels of LTS. Fig. 2 illustrates the differences in means at time 1 and time 2, and shows how the significant difference in trust at time 1 becomes non-significant at time 2, which implies that an increase in trust in the coaching group results as they catch up with the control group.

As the coaching group and control group are different in size, we conducted a Mann-Whitney U test on the changes in LRE and LTS to compare the distribution of these variables between the two groups. The results confirmed that the distribution of change in the LRE variable was different between the two groups ($p = .03$), and this was also the case for the change in the LTS variable ($p = .05$). These results indicate that the leaders in the coaching group did increase their LRE and LTS during the coaching period. To provide evidence for possible changes in the leaders' behavior as a result of coaching, we correlated the change in trust scores

Table 2
Mean scores, SD for coaching and control groups at time 1 and time 2, *t*- and *p*-values.

Variables	Coach group N = 24				Control group N = 6				<i>t</i> - and <i>p</i> -values			
	T1		T2		T1		T2		T1		T2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	t	p
Leader efficacy	3.26	1.50	4.96	1.44	6.03	.61	6.03	.63	4.40	.05	1.77	.10
Trust	3.10	1.40	5.10	1.22	6.17	.52	6.08	.56	5.21	.05	1.88	.116

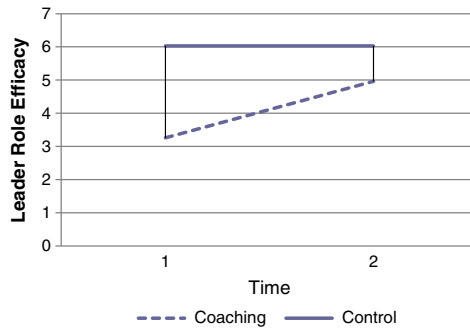


Fig. 1. Leader role efficacy. Difference between coaching and control group.

for the leaders in the coaching group with their subordinate's changes in psychological empowerment and turnover intentions (Hypothesis 3).

The results show no significant correlations between changes in LTS and the four dimensions of empowerment, and so Hypothesis 3a was not supported. However, there was a moderate and significant correlation between change in LTS and change in turnover intention. The relationship was negative, indicating that an increase in trust is related to a decrease in turnover intention, which is supportive for Hypothesis 3b.

Although the results in Table 3 support the hypotheses that coaching had an impact on the participating leaders, the difference in means in our *t*-test at T1 for both LRE and LTS could be an indication of selection bias, implying that only those who felt a need for leadership coaching would sign up. This would explain a lower level of confidence in oneself and others among leaders in the coaching group. Consequently, an alternative explanation for the changes in LRE and LTS could be that confidence in mastering the leadership role builds naturally with the passing of time and not as a consequence of coaching. Furthermore, statistical regression is another possible explanation, because a leader who scores low at baseline will probably not score as low at time 2, and a leader who scores high at baseline will probably not score higher at time 2, a phenomenon referred to as “regression to the mean” (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). We performed a regression analysis to obtain further evidence regarding alternative explanations. The purpose was to investigate whether variation in the increase of LRE and LTS among the participating leaders could be explained by a factor solely related to the coaching process such as variation in facilitative coach behavior. Such an analysis would also provide us with a formative evaluation to address an active mechanism at play during coaching. For this purpose, we computed two new variables, “change in LRE” and “change in LTS”, by subtracting the means for LRE and LTS at T1 from their respective means at T2. Then we computed residual variables for “change in LRE” and “change in LTS”, and entered these into our regression analysis to control for variation among the leaders' scores at baseline. The regression results are shown in Tables 4 and 5. We included the variance inflation factor (VIF) values as a test of multicollinearity between the two variables.

The results show that approximately one-quarter of the variation in the change in LRE was explained by the coach's facilitative behavior. The adjusted R square was .13 for the change in LTS. This supports our hypotheses suggesting that facilitative coach behavior would influence LRE (Hypothesis 3) and LTS (Hypothesis 4). It also indicates that the increase in LRE and LTS for the coaching group is related to the coaching program as such and not to the mere passing of time. Consequently, Hypotheses 1 and 2 suggesting that leadership coaching will facilitate an increase of LRE and LTS were strengthened further. The VIFs are far below a common cutoff value at 10 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), indicating that multicollinearity should not be a concern.

A summary of the results is illustrated in Fig. 3. The mean levels of LRE and LTS at baseline (T1) are shown to the far left of the figure. The mean levels of these two variables at T2 are displayed to the far right. The hypotheses regarding how the coach's

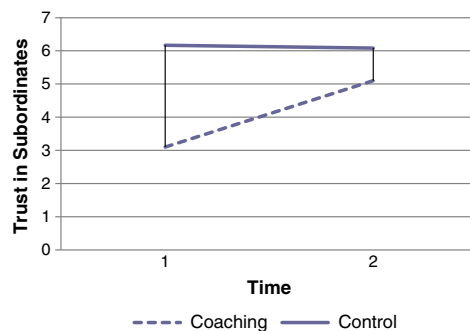


Fig. 2. Trust in subordinates. Difference between coaching and control group.

Table 3
Correlations between leader's change in trust and subordinates' changes in empowerment and turnover intentions.

Variables	Change in trust from leader
Change in empowerment	
Meaning	.03
Self-determination	-.04*
Impact	.11
Competence	.21
Change in turnover intentions	-.30**

Note. $N = 63$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

facilitative behavior may contribute to explaining the variation in the changes in LRE and LTS, and how a change in LTS is related to subordinates' turnover intentions are shown at the center of the figure.

Discussion

Leadership coaching has been presented as a promising leadership development practice (Day, 2000; Ely et al., 2010). This study investigated the effects of leadership coaching as a leader and leadership development tool and provides empirical evidence in favor of its practice. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to assess the outcome of leadership coaching with a mixed methods design comprising a focus group discussion and a quasi-experimental field study with multisource data. The objectives of our study were twofold. The first objective was to provide appropriate outcome criteria that maintain the essence of coaching (idiosyncratic process and goals) and enable assessment of the effectiveness of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool across leaders and organizations. Our analysis of the focus group discussion in the first part of our study led us to suggest leader role efficacy (LRE) (Hannah et al., 2008; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010) and leaders' trust in subordinates (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999) as appropriate outcome criteria that link both theory and practice. There are strong indications that LRE is instrumental to leadership performance and leadership performance ratings (Anderson et al., 2008; Chemers et al., 2000; Lester et al., 2011; Luthans & Peterson, 2003). Furthermore, LRE is a critical component in leadership development, and in line with Lester et al. (2011), we believe that it is an aspect that can be developed effectively. Finally, we believe that LRE is crucial for leaders across organizations to thrive. Leaders' trust in subordinates (LTS) is another variable that we argue is vital for leaders as it influences leadership performance and a high-quality relationship between leader and subordinates (Bandura, 2000; Hannah et al., 2008; Watson, Chemers, & Preiser, 2001). We argue that LTS and LRE should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of leadership coaching.

The second objective of the study was to test whether leadership coaching could influence our suggested outcome criteria in terms of increased LRE and LTS, using a rigorous research design. The purpose was first to provide summative evaluation and to test our two suggested outcome criteria, and then to provide a formative evaluation explaining one of the mechanisms that contribute to the hypothesized changes in these outcome criteria. Findings from our quasi-experimental field study lend support to our five hypotheses. The leaders in the coaching group increased their levels of LRE. This is in line with previous empirical findings linking coaching to self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2010; Evers et al., 2006; Finn et al., 2007; Moen & Skaalvik, 2009). However, our study addresses general LRE beyond a specific leadership theory and should thus make our findings more applicable to leadership development in general. We found that leaders who increased their LRE had confidence in their ability to master tasks in their general leader role, self-reflectiveness, and agential behavior. We also found that the leaders who participated in the coaching process increased their LTS. Furthermore, the increase in trust was related to a decrease in the turnover intentions of the leaders' subordinates. This is encouraging, as the willingness to take risks has been argued to be based on a trait such as general propensity to trust (Mayer et al., 1995) or to relate to subordinates (Brower et al., 2000). In challenging this trait perspective, our findings imply that LTS in specific contexts may also be open to development and may be influenced by leadership coaching.

Table 4
Regression results for change in leader role efficacy.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Change in leader role efficacy		
	Beta	Sig	VIF
Coach	.00	.99	1.04
Gender	.00	.97	1.19
Tenure present job	.12	.55	1.09
Coach's facilitative behavior	.55	.01	1.06
Adj. r^2 : .24			
Cohen's f^2 : .67			

Note. $N = 24$.

Table 5
Regression results for change in trust in subordinates.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Change in trust in subordinates		
	Beta	Sig	VIF
Coach	-.01	.95	1.04
Gender	.28	.20	1.19
Tenure present job	.10	.82	1.09
Coach's facilitative behavior	.48	.03	1.06
Adj. r^2 : .13			
Cohen's f^2 = .47			

Note. $N = 24$.

However, some caution should still be applied regarding the interpretation of the treatment effects of coaching on LRE and LTS from our data, as there were quite substantial differences between the coaching and the control group on these two variables at T1. While we controlled for the variances through a residual analysis, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that at least a part of the changes in LRE and LTS between T1 and T2 were caused by these initial differences.

Our findings indicate that the change in trust is manifested in leader behavior that may not necessarily be consciously picked up by the subordinates (who did not perceive a change in psychological empowerment) but still may have an effect on the unconscious level, as turnover intention seems to decrease as trust increases. This can be interpreted as an improvement in subordinates' relationship to their leader, which in turn may have impact on organizational performance.

Finally, our findings reveal that facilitative coach behavior may explain the changes in both LRE and LTS. In other words, the coach's behavior (providing support, challenge, and feedback) played an important role in the leadership development process.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the leadership development literature in general and to the research on leadership coaching in particular. As LRE appears to be a robust outcome of leadership coaching, future research could build on these results while also taking into account recent developments within the literature on leader efficacy. For example, Anderson et al. (2008) suggest that efficacy beliefs can be related to some specific leadership behaviors (e.g., communication) more than others (e.g., change). Future research could investigate whether the general LRE obtained through coaching affects some specific leader behaviors more than others. Ely et al. (2010) categorize self-efficacy as a cognitive learning outcome in their framework, and this variable could represent a valuable theoretical link between learning outcomes and leader behavior.

A second theoretical contribution relates to LTS as a vital outcome from leadership coaching. Most research on trust has addressed subordinates' trust in their leader (STL). It can be argued that STL is based on different beliefs and has different contents and consequences from LTS (Brower et al., 2000; Kramer & Tyler, 1996). In the very definition of leader and subordinate lies the difference in power and authority of the two parties (Kramer & Tyler, 1996). LTS will have different content and dimensions from STL; for example, trust in the subordinates' willingness to act in the interest of the organization or to act responsibly and proactively when granted authority. Sharing decision-making power with subordinates implies losing some control over the creation of these results (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). STL, on the other hand, refers to whether subordinates are comfortable with their leader's having influence and control over issues that are important for them. Recent measures of trust in leaders reflect this direction-specific definition in the leader-subordinate dyad (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Mayer & Gavin, 2005).

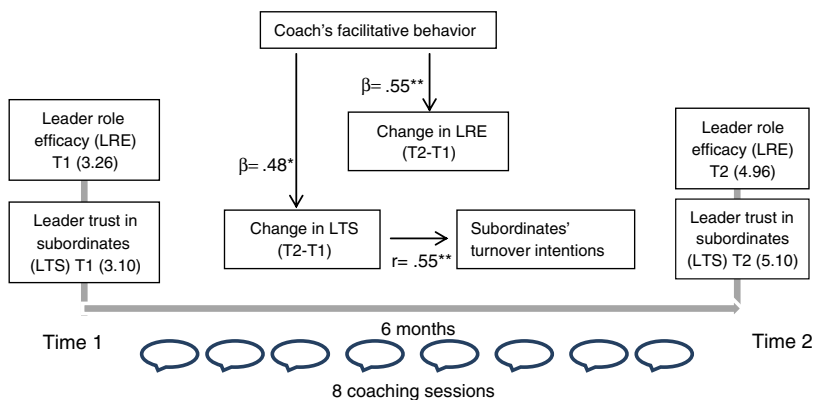


Fig. 3. Summary of the results.

Consequently, we suggest that LTS has substantively different content from STL and should be addressed independently in models and measures of organizational trust (Brower et al., 2000; Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Kramer & Tyler, 1996). The findings from our study show that leadership coaching can increase leaders' propensity to trust their subordinates, and should consequently add to the scarce literature on LTS. We believe that LTS is a concept worth further attention in leadership research. Further investigations into how trust affects both instrumental and social-psychological aspects of the leader-subordinate relationship could represent a fruitful strand.

Implications for leadership development practices

Our findings are relevant for practical purposes. In line with Day, Harrison, and Halpin (2009), we believe that to accelerate effective leadership development, organizations could focus more on the interior processes and less on the exterior and observable competencies as primary outcomes of their leadership development programs. As leaders develop an "internal core", acquiring the competencies to exercise effective leadership may follow as a natural "by-product" (Day et al., 2009: xiii). We argue that LRE is an internal process that is part of such an internal core, and the consequence of strengthening this may be accelerated leadership development. The confident leader may increase his/her attempts to claim a leader identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Lester et al., 2011). This claiming of leadership will expose the leader to more leadership experiences to learn from, thereby creating positive learning spirals (Day & Harrison, 2007). In addition, LRE may influence leadership development through self-motivation and perseverance (Hannah et al., 2008). We believe that leadership development programs should aim at developing LRE, and our study shows that leadership coaching is a leadership development tool that may contribute significantly to this purpose.

Our formative evaluation indicates that facilitative coach behavior will influence the changes in LRE and LTS. Organizations wanting to develop their leaders can offer leadership coaching as a development initiative, as our findings indicate that it may increase levels of LRE and LTS, both of which are vital to leadership performance and future leadership development. However, to ensure effective leadership development, organizations should make sure that their external and/or internal coaches are confident and competent enough to provide facilitative coaching behavior for leaders (support, challenge, and feedback) during the coaching process. Furthermore, to ensure future development for both leaders and the field of leadership development, organizations should evaluate their leadership development initiatives using validated measures before and after the initiative, and not only at the end of the program.

Potential limitations and conclusion

The contributions of this research should be viewed in light of several limitations. First, the sample size represents a typical and important challenge that coaching studies meet when analyzing the coaching process with multivariate statistics as it may be difficult to produce enough statistical power (Baron et al., 2011). This study is no exception in terms of sample size. When a coaching program is offered in an organization, the number of participants is seldom higher than 100 (Baron et al., 2011) except for studies in organizations such as the military (e.g., Boyce et al., 2010; Lester et al., 2011). However, despite our small sample size, the different analyses that we have conducted, both summative and formative as well as from different sources, indicate that our findings are fairly robust. Another limitation is the possibility of selection bias. In line with previous studies of coaching, this study has relied on voluntary participation (e.g. Bono et al., 2009; Lester et al., 2011; Moen & Skaalvik, 2009). This puts some limits on the generalization of our findings, and the study should only generalize to leaders motivated for leadership development. However, as "randomized allocation to intervention or control is often extremely difficult in real-life field research" (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007: 245), a consequence is that most coaching studies have used a single-group, pre-post within-subjects design. Our study shows that a pre-post-test design with control group and multisource measures may alleviate some of the statistical threats caused by selection bias.

The study was conducted in Norway, implying that the results may be culture-specific and less relevant in other national cultures. For example, some studies have revealed national differences in perceptions of effective leadership and these differences may be associated with cultural dimensions, such as power distance and collectivism (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). The Nordic cluster of countries, to which Norway belongs, is in these studies characterized by low power distance, high performance orientation and in-group collectivism. This is associated with high scores on the endorsement of participative and value-based leadership (Dickson et al., 2003, p. 738). National context may be as important as other contexts, such as organizational or hierarchical level (Jepson, 2009), and we cannot exclude the possibility that leadership development programs in Norway may put more weight on relational leadership as mutual influence processes than in other cultures, amplifying the importance of employees' participation in decision-making.

The overall objective of this study was to contribute to the development of the theory of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool and to respond to calls such as: "little attention has been paid to the emerging practice of executive coaching by HRD [human resource development] scholars and no efforts for theory building to guide future research have been made" (Joo, 2005: 464). Our study adds to the knowledge base of both formative and summative evaluation, and argues that leadership coaching is a valuable leadership development tool. The strength of our study lies in our use of a mixed methods design combining qualitative and quantitative methods, providing us with opportunities for expansion and development. Our combination of methods and data sources should give a more complete picture of the effects of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool than any one of these alone.

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CHAPTER 5

PAPER 2

*Developing leader identities: An empirical study of the content of leader identities
and how they change*

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Developing leader identities: An empirical study of the content of leader identities and how they change

Abstract. This study explores leader identities from a stories' and self-meanings' perspective. Based upon analysis of leader identity descriptions of 68 managers and the detailed leader self-stories provided by 26 of these, I suggest that leader identities are constructed through stories that contain three forms of self-meaning: leadership *mode* (behaviors and styles), leadership *attributes* (traits, abilities and skills), and leadership *values* (ideals and principles). I propose that leader identities change through a process of reconstruction as managers compare stories of their current leader role performance with stories of who they have been and could become as leaders, and as a consequence come to reevaluate the *strength* (stronger/weaker) and readdress the *content* (adding, replacing, losing and shedding) of these forms of self-meaning. The empirical findings and theorizing in this study advance our understanding of leader identities and their development, propose a first step for integrating opposing streams of thought and suggest ways for identity-based leader development practice.

Introduction

Identity refers to the self-meanings that help define who one is when one occupies a role, is a member of a group or claims characteristics as a unique person (Burke & Stets, 2009). While identity has been a fertile and fast growing research area in organizational studies for more than two decades (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2009), it has only recently entered the leadership literature (Ibarra, Wittman, Petriglieri, & Day, 2014). In this emerging field of *leader identity* it is suggested that identity plays a crucial role in enabling effective leadership (Day & Harrison, 2007) and accelerating leader development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009).

Leader identity has been defined as “having a self-view as a leader” (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 594) including “goals, objectives, personal strengths and limitations” (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 365). Leader identity is believed to provide individuals in leadership roles with a structure to organize and access relevant information that helps them understand and motivate subordinates (Lord & Hall, 2005) and enhances their capacity to be effective in completely novel situations (Day, 2013). Individuals who are able to negotiate leadership performance that is consistent with their identity have been found to become more satisfied and inclined to remain in the group (Riley & Burke, 1995).

Since identities influence behavior and help organize and give meaning to memories, it has been suggested that a leader identity may also accelerate positive developmental spirals (Day et al., 2009) and facilitate leader development (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Day, 2013; Day & Harrison, 2007; Day & Sin, 2011; Hall, 2004; Ibarra, Snook, & Guillen Ramo, 2010; Lapierre, Naidoo, & Bonaccio, 2012; Lord & Hall, 2005).

The way identity functions as a powerful sense-making (Weick, 1995) and motivational device (Markus & Wurf, 1987) gaining insights into the content of leader

identities may be vital for advancing our understanding of how people engage in leadership and how they develop as ‘leaders’.

Unfortunately, empirical studies addressing the content of leader identities are “seriously lacking” (Muir, 2012, p. 1). This study aims to address this lack through an explorative qualitative study that investigates the leader identity descriptions of 68 managers with leadership (i.e., personnel) responsibility, from four different contexts (public service, bank/finance, insurance and technology services) and the deeper identity reflections of 26 experienced, senior managers in role transition (from among the 68).

The leader identity literature seems to be divided into two streams: one *critical* (e.g., Andersson, 2010; Ford, 2010; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Watson, 2008) and one *positive* (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Eriksen, 2009; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005). Sinclair (2011) has suggested that these two streams are built on opposing assumptions with the critical stream interpreting leader identity as dynamic, multiple, constructed through social interaction and influenced by different discourses, and the positive stream believing identity is a unitary, coherent construction produced by the individual.

In order to advance our understanding of leader identities, I argue, we need to start seeing these opposing beliefs as complementary perspectives and integrate elements from both streams to provide a more realistic view. I propose that interpreting leader identities in the form of self-narratives or stories that integrate the individual’s past, present and future (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1996; Singer, 2004) represents a bridging perspective that may help integrate the two streams of thought. Since multiple fragmented and contradicting stories (identities) can be assembled into a coherent leader self-story (leader identity), understanding leader identity as a “storied-self” (McAdams, 1996) acknowledges the assumptions of both

the critical and positive streams of research. In this study I investigate the content of leader identities through the stories individuals in leader roles tell themselves and others to convey who they are as a leader.

In addition to employing a storied-self interpretation, I rely on role identity theory (RIT) (Ashforth, 2001; McCall & Simmons, 1978). RIT has suggested that role identities contain both an *idiosyncratic* and *conventional* dimension due to the way individuals need to use their character traits to improvise while dealing with vague, incomplete and poorly specified role expectations. One of the strengths of RIT lies in the way it addresses the idiosyncratic (personal) dimension of role identities, which the more commonly used social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and identity theory (IT) (Burke, 1980; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000) fail to address (Hitlin, 2003). This personal dimension is usually left unattended to in leader identity research (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009), but may represent a particularly valuable aspect of leader identities that help managers engage in leadership and develop as leaders (Hall, 2004). In this study I investigate the relative proportion of the idiosyncratic and conventional aspects of leader identities across four different contexts.

The study addresses three research questions: What is the content of leader identities? What is the relative proportion of idiosyncratic and conventional aspects of leader identities? How do leader identities change? Throughout this paper I use the terms *manager* and *leader role* in line with Mintzberg (1973) assuming that a manager will have different forms of responsibilities (roles), some that involve leadership and others that involve for example administration. I suggest that 'leader identities' refers to the particular part of their managerial identities that addresses leadership.

This study contributes to the field of leader identity in several ways. First, it addresses the need for more empirical studies on the content of leader identities. Second, the study

provides a more detailed interpretation of leader identities and suggests mechanisms through which they change, which may be valuable for advancing our understanding of an important knowledge structure that is believed to influence leader role enactment and development. Third, the study suggests a first step toward integrating critical and positive streams of leader identity research by using a storied-self interpretation as a bridging perspective. And finally, it contributes to practice by describing ways that organizations may help managers engage in conscious leader identity reflection and identity-based leader development. Before I address the empirical findings and discuss their theoretical and practical implications, I will present a brief review of the leader identity literature.

Leader identities and leader identity construction

Leader identities: ‘Identity’ and ‘self-concept’ are often used interchangeably and may be defined as “personal characteristics, feelings and images, as well as roles and social status” (Markus & Wurf, 1987, p. 301), or as “the self-meanings that define who one is” (Burke, 2006, p. 81). The simplest way of defining leader identity is seeing/thinking of oneself as a leader (Day & Sin, 2011; DeRue et al., 2009; Lord & Hall, 2005), or as having confidence in one’s ability to intentionally engage in leadership (Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). A more elaborate definition on leader identity refers to self-views as a leader resulting from leadership roles and skills being integrated into the individuals’ personal self-identity (Lord & Hall, 2005). I favor the more elaborate definition and understand leader identity not only as identification with *being* a leader but also the contextualized understanding of *who* one is as a leader. In this study I will explore the content of this self-understanding and how it changes resulting in new leader identities.

Leadership scholars building on SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and taking a *social identity* perspective suggest leader identities refer to how strongly individuals identify with the social leader category, how prototypical they find themselves to be of the leader role, and

how central their identification with being a leader is to their self-definition (Rus, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010). However, the social identity perspective is incapable of describing the unique and essential characteristics of leader identities (DeRue et al., 2009). Furthermore, not everyone who perceives him/herself to be a 'leader' believes that they are prototypical of the leader role (e.g., female leaders) (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). Consequently it has been argued that leader identities are better understood as *personal* identities (DeRue et al., 2009; Hall, 2004), which means that they are based on the personal traits, abilities, and interests that individuals display and that others attribute to them (Ashforth, 2001). However, empirical studies addressing the content of leader identities – as personal or social – are lacking (Muir, 2012). This study addresses this empirical gap.

According to RIT (McCall & Simmons, 1978) the expectations that comprise social roles are usually too vague, incomplete, and poorly specified to serve as real guides for action: which means individuals need to use their character traits and improvise to deal with the broad demands of social roles. As a consequence role identities will develop containing both an idiosyncratic and a conventional dimension (McCall & Simmon, 1978). Since there is no objective measurement of what it means to be a leader (DeRue et al. 2009), I argue that expectations tied to a leader role are also vague, incomplete and poorly specified, and so will demand improvisation on behalf of individuals in leadership roles. Consequently we may expect that leader identities will contain both an idiosyncratic and a conventional dimension. This study explores their relative proportion.

Critical management studies' interpretation of leader identities, differ from the theoretical explanations of SIT, IT and RIT on a much deeper level. They see leader identities as "fantasy" creations (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006, p. 220) and "personas that aspire to look like leadership" (Sinclair, 2011, p. 509). Rather than explore the content of leader identities, these critical studies tend to investigate the process of leader identity construction.

Leader identity construction refers to the process during which individuals attempt to create a sense of self in the leader role. Lührmann and Eberl (2007) suggest that this construction takes place in the form of a cyclical process. Building on identity research (Blumer, 1962; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) and SIT of leadership (Turner & Haslam, 2001; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005), they describe a cycle consisting of periods of stability and change as individuals go through four distinct phases: validation, stabilization, crisis, and perception.

Another dynamic model that attends to the creation of leader identities, suggests they develop through a reciprocal social construction process as individuals claim and grant leader and follower identities (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). As individuals engage in social interaction these identities become internalized, then relationally recognized, and with time collectively endorsed (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

While these two conceptual models paint neat pictures of the development of leader identities, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) present a messy and fine-grained account of one manager's identity struggles as she embraces, negotiates, and rejects managerial roles in a process they label "identity work" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1188). Their study offers an alternative perspective to the many studies that emphasize "coherence, continuity, and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1188). The stream of critical management studies that follows in this study's footsteps also report on anxiety and tension as powerless, enslaved, and insecure managers struggle with multiple identities (Andersson, 2010; Ford, 2010; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014; Watson, 2008) and end up constructing fantasy creations (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006, p. 220) or lose their identities (Nicholson and Carroll, 2013).

The literature on leader identities and how they change through processes of identity construction, covers a wide span from positive descriptions of coherent leader identities that

develop gradually, to highly critical tales of pressures to produce leader personas and the struggles involved as individuals attend to multiple and competing stories of self. The purpose of this study is to add to our knowledge of complex leader identity phenomena by offering empirical insights and theorizing while considering opposing identity streams as complementary perspectives.

Method

To explore and build theory on the content of leader identities and how they change, I employed a multiple-case research design (Eisenhardt, 1989) which may help reveal relevant concepts in the emergent theory and improve theory building (Bryman, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1991; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). I collected data from four different contexts (public service, bank/finance, insurance, and technology services) using two forms of data collection: semi-structured interviews with experienced, senior managers and an open questionnaire offered to two additional groups of managers asking them to reflect upon: “Who am I as a leader?”

While the interviews provided rich data in the form of detailed stories, the open questionnaire offered a ‘snap-shot’ of leader identities in the form of shorthand descriptions and bullet-point answers. The questionnaire answers facilitated my search for general categories that helped cast light on the rich interview stories, while the stories added depth and life to the general leader identity descriptions of the questionnaire. Together these two sets of data presented me with more empirical breadth and depth than either of them alone and helped advance my theorizing.

Context, sample and data collection open questionnaire

The open questionnaire was handed out (in spring 2014) to 47 Norwegian managers with leadership responsibility (defined as personnel responsibility) who attended a leadership course, resulting in 42 completed answers. Of the two groups, one was from an insurance

company (22), and the other from technology services (20). The managers were between 27 and 61 years of age (the majority in their mid-forties and early fifties); four were part of their top management team, three were new to the leader role, while the most experienced had held up to nine previous managerial roles with leadership responsibility. The managers were given ten minutes to reflect upon who they were as leaders.

Context, sample and data collection interviews

Contexts: The contexts and the participating managers in the interviews were selected based on theoretical sampling, i.e., chosen for their anticipated relevance and to help develop the emergent theory. I selected three different contexts based upon their varying degrees of predefined leader role expectations: public service (the strongest), banking/finance, and technology service (the weakest). The public service and technology service were chosen to serve as examples of polar types, that is extreme cases, to be compared to facilitate theory development (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990).

Sample: Using a set of selection criteria, 26 managers were recruited to the study from across the three contexts. The criteria were: formal leadership experience (a minimum of three previous managerial roles with leadership responsibility), early stage of role transition (one to six months into a new role), and tenure with the organization (minimum one year). Due to the strict selection criteria, the managers were not equally dispersed across all contexts. Seven were from public service, 15 from bank/finance, and four from technology service. 14 were women and 12 were men. Seven of the managers held top management positions (e.g., CEO and HR director) and 19 upper middle management positions (e.g., bank manager). Their ages were between 28 and 62, with the majority in their mid to late forties.

The selection criteria were chosen to facilitate my search for rich real-time identity reflections. The first and most important criterion was experience from several managerial roles with leadership responsibility. I expected this group of managers to have more identity

reflections tied to the leader role than someone who was a newcomer. Among the participants, some were struggling to perceive of themselves as ‘leaders’, some offered long accounts of who they were in the leader role, while others had not given much thought to identity.

Early role transition was a second criterion as role change may trigger personal explorations resulting in changes to self-awareness and sometimes of identity (Ashforth, 2001; Hall, 2004; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). By interviewing these transitioning managers I hoped to gain access to identity reactions before they were forgotten or colored by memory biases. The final sampling criterion was tenure, to ensure that the identity reflections were related to their new role rather than to a new organizational culture. All 26 participants met the three criteria.

Data collection: The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the late spring of 2012 and spring 2013. The participants were given acronyms: PS (public service), BF (bank/finance), and TS (technology services) and a number 1–28. 28 managers were originally interviewed but, due to the strict selection criteria, data from two managers were removed from the analysis. The interviews were recorded and extensive handwritten notes were taken to enable immediate analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim professionally for further analysis and the final 26 interviews comprise 416 pages of single-spaced typescript.

The participants received an interview guide a few days prior to our interview. The interview guide contained questions on how they experienced the role transition, what they found difficult, what it meant to be a ‘leader’ in their organization, leader development programs that had made an impression, and critical incidents that had influenced them as leaders (see Appendix 1 for interview guide). The interview guide provided a structure for the interviews, but the managers were free to follow their own pace and answer questions in their preferred order. I followed up on topics that the managers showed a particular interest in

(displaying changes in emotion such as tone of voice, speed of talk and other non-verbal cues) and I probed for deeper reflections when they touched upon themes that emerged through my parallel process of data analysis.

I acknowledge that it is not possible or warranted to be an impartial observer that enters the research scene “without an interpretive frame of reference” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). Thus, rather than assume I could leave my theoretical understanding and assumptions behind, I used a wide theoretical identity repertoire (spanning sociology, social psychology, organizational psychology, personnel psychology, and management literature) during the iterative data collection and analysis to keep me from ‘proving’ any particular theory and kept a diary in which I reflected on my evolving assumptions. The two identity perspectives that proved to be particularly relevant when crafting my final theory – identity as a “storied-self” (McAdams, 1996) and identity as “self-in-role-meanings” (Ashforth, 2001; Burke, 1980; Burke & Stets, 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1978) – were not chosen in advance but found their way into the theorizing toward the end of the iterative data analysis.

Analytical procedures

The data were analyzed in three phases.

Phase 1. The first phase commenced in the late spring of 2012 and progressed in parallel with the interviews. I performed open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) by circling words and sentences in my handwritten notes within 24 hours of each interview and suggested preliminary categories in the margins. I developed memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) describing these categories and their potential properties. The categories were grouped together into higher order categories and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) (e.g., moving between old, current and possible selves emerged as an important theme from early on). To avoid falling into the typical trap of assigning new names to old concepts (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) and to delimit the theory, the categories were compared for differences

and similarities with extant theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Phase 2. The second phase of data analysis began in the middle of the (interview) data collection period and continued up to its end in June 2013. During this stage, the transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed with the use of a software program (QDAMiner), which helped me select the most prevalent categories (based upon frequency and distinctiveness) and assemble them into higher order constructs (e.g., stories addressing who the managers aspired to become and who they shied away from were assembled into a higher order construct called “possible selves” a term I borrowed from Markus and Nurius (1986)). During this phase the “storied-self” (McAdams, 1996) perspective on leader identities emerged as particularly useful for further analysis, as the managers tended to use stories to describe and ‘prove’ who they were as leaders.

I performed cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) in search of patterns of variation across contexts, hierarchical level, gender and individuals. Six managers stood out from the rest due to their common tendency to define themselves in terms of who they were *not* (a category I labeled ‘not-me’). Further comparisons within and between this group and the rest, permitted what Yin (2003) and Eisenhardt (1989) refer to as “replication logic” in which each case is treated as an “experiment” that confirms or disconfirms inferences drawn from the other cases (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 542) and helped advance the theorizing.

Phase 3. In the final phase of the data analysis I coded the open questionnaires and discovered three new categories (*leadership mode, attributes, and values*). All leader self-stories and descriptions from the interviews were then coded again using these three categories as a “coding template” (King, 2012, p. 426). This introduced a new and valuable perspective to my theorizing and suggested it would be helpful to understand the content of leader identities as “self-in-role meanings” (Ashforth, 2001; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stets

& Burke, 2000) that were conveyed through stories. Exploring how these self-meanings evolved across the managers' narrated stories from their past, present and future, helped reveal the mechanisms through which leader identities develop which resulted in my final theory.

Findings

In this section I will present the results of my data analysis and summarize them in a conceptual model that describes the content of leader identities and how they change. However, I will first make a brief comment on leader vs. management identities.

The participants in this study varied their use of labels when addressing themselves and other individuals with leadership responsibility. *Leader*, *manager* (administrator), *chief* and *boss* were used interchangeably. I did not enter into a discussion as to whether they were referring to leaders or managers, or were performing leadership or management. I defined 'leadership responsibility' to the managers as 'personnel responsibility' but let the managers interpret for themselves what sort of responsibility this would entail and what it meant to be a leader. In my analysis I did not exclude answers that may have been describing a general managerial identity (e.g., "I have great administrative skills"). That said, most of the interview stories and questionnaire answers were related to leadership themes in particular such as inspiring others, setting direction, facilitating change and enhancing the development of subordinates, and so seemed to address leader identities in particular.

I will now present the empirical findings and categories that comprise the final conceptual model. Since the empirical insights from the open questionnaire and semi-structured interviews are in accordance with one another, I will present them together.

The content of leader identities

As I analyzed the open questionnaires for insights into the content of leader identities, three categories of self-in-leader-role-meanings emerged: leadership mode, leadership attributes, and leadership values. *Leadership mode* described self-reflections concerning *how* they tended to and aspired to lead. *Leadership attributes* described *what* traits and abilities/skills they had come to learn and believe were particularly descriptive of themselves in a leader role context. And *leadership values* described underlying ideals and principles concerning *why* they engaged in leadership the way they did. These same three categories were also present in the managers' self-stories and helped them define what it meant to be who they were as leaders.

Leadership mode was the first form of self-in-leader-role-meaning. In the open questionnaire the managers presented a number of labels describing their habitual and favored leadership behaviors and styles. The same form of labels was used during the interviews. Some of the reoccurring examples across questionnaires and the interviews were: I am a coaching leader, a sparring partner, a facilitator, a team-player, I am a visionary, I delegate a lot (too little), I unite people toward a common goal, I give inspiring speeches, I always address conflict (hide from conflict), I am solution-oriented, goal-oriented, people-oriented, operational, technical, I am hands-on (hands off), empowering and involving. The stories offered during the interviews tended to describe one particular form of leadership mode at a time.

They were not used to having a top manager come and listen to their client calls. This was completely new to them. They were used to people coming and watching them, but not really joining them in what they did. And having a top manager come in and go all the way down to their level and get what they do, that they really appreciated. And that is the kind of leader I am. I want to really understand the everyday experience of my employees, even though I have managers under me who are responsible for them, it is important that I understand the whole setting. They were so appreciative of what I did, and I felt very welcome. That is the kind of thing I will continue doing. I guess I am more involving in my leadership style than the other managers, and now even more than I used to be. (PS11)

Leadership attributes: Each of the answers to the questionnaires contained several traits (a few listed none and some as many as ten, but the most common was a list of three to four traits). While the traits were usually described on a positive note (e.g., hard-working, curious, calm, positive, structured, flexible, efficient, patient, courageous, creative, curious, funny, confident, considerate, optimistic, fair and empathetic), some would also add negative traits to their list (e.g., rigid, impatient, controlling, unstructured, arrogant, and loud).

This way of listing traits was also typical in the interviews during which the managers would fairly easily present themselves using several short, descriptive statements:

My goodness, I have way too much courage. I think I'm a fairly nice person. And yes, I'm pretty focused, a pretty structured person, and I'm very positive. I guess most people would say that I'm a more than average positive. I just don't give up. And there's something about my speed. And yes, communication, one could say I'm good at communicating, well, you hear how I'm rambling on non-stop, well, I need to get to the point. I care about people, and I feel I'm a relatively empathetic person. But at the same time quite clear, and a tiny bit determined. (BF16)

Abilities/skills was another important aspect of leadership attributes. Describing oneself as a leader with good communication skills, the ability to motivate and inspire others or make tough decisions were reoccurring examples. In the interviews these abilities and skills tended to be backed up with anecdotes of feedback and success stories which would validate their existence (e.g., "When I was a child, my grandfather who is an accomplished leader, once saw me in the sandbox with other children, organizing and fixing, and he said: 'That girl has got leadership skills!' So I grew up believing I had these skills." BF6).

Some time back I learned that I have the ability to tackle very stressful situations, and I think it influences who I am as a leader. It gives me a calming quality in addition to my experience, you know, so that you become better at handling the unforeseen. There was one incident in particular that I learned a lot from. I was relatively new to my role as a bank manager, and my boss was away on holiday when a cash machine belonging to our branch was blown up and robbed. It happened early in the morning. There was a lot of press, and I had to get up and in front of all these blitzing cameras and go on national TV. And some of my employees didn't really believe in me, and so tried to take over the whole thing. And I had to literally yell and tell them, I am responsible for this. It was a tough struggle. I was not trained for handling the press. This was really learning by doing, but I handled the whole situation really well, and it has built my self-confidence. So if anyone asks me what kind of a leader I am, I tell

them I have the ability to take action, I dare throw myself into challenging situations. I even like challenges as I have the ability to keep my calm when there is chaos around me. (BF21)

Leadership values was the third and final form of self-meaning. In the questionnaires the managers used value-oriented words such as respectful, honest, responsible and open (usually one to two examples) to describe themselves as leaders. In the interviews they would elaborate on these core values, underline the importance of being ‘authentic’ and ‘true to their values’ and sometimes explain how their values had come into being.

I have this internally driven way of always having to take responsibility. I guess it has to do with my upbringing, my father, and maybe mostly my mother and her mother. They were strong women. My grandmother I remember particularly well. She never took any kind of education, but she took on an enormous responsibility in her village. She would collect money for everything, she had buildings developed and helped the disabled. She was an extremely strong woman. And so my mother was the first to get an education in her village. And these women who lived fully and took on responsibility beyond themselves they taught me that you have a duty to make up your mind, a duty to not sit and watch but to actually do something. That is ingrained in all of me, in my whole body, in who I am as a leader. (PS9)

The three categories of self-in-leader-role meanings seemed to be mutually interactive in the way that the managers often described leadership attributes and leadership mode in accordance with their values, and seemed to have developed a preference for leadership style/behaviors (leadership mode) that allowed for the use of traits and developed skills (leadership attributes). For example, several managers described themselves as empathetic and caring (attributes), then explained how they valued consideration and respect (values) and concluded with being ‘people-oriented rather than technical or structural’ (leadership mode). To describe visually how these three leader identity components were integrated, I developed a conceptual model which shows how each form of self-meaning is linked to the other two (see figure 1).

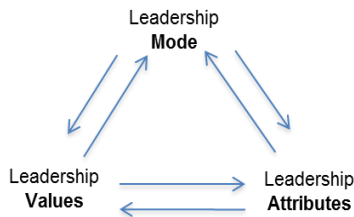


Figure 1: Three-component structure

This three-component structure of leader identities resembles Schein’s concept of “career anchors” (Schein, 1978), but differs in one important aspect: ‘leadership mode’ which is missing in Schein’s model. Schein suggested that through successive trials and job challenges, individuals would gain self-knowledge and with time develop an “occupational self-concept” consisting of self-perceived “talents and abilities, motives and needs, and attitudes and values.” (Schein, 1978, p. 125). He proposed that a “managerial anchor” was one among five types of anchors (in addition to autonomous, creativity, technical and stability), and suggested that members of each anchor-group would share a set of common competencies and goals.

Unlike Schein (1978), I did not attempt to classify different types of occupational self-concepts, but set out to explore the content of leader self-concepts in particular. This may explain why leadership mode emerged as a third component in my study only. The other two components, however, represent aspects of the managers’ identities that may transcend a number of their personal and social identities (e.g., ‘great communication skills’ may also be a self-defining attribute in one’s identity as a friend, spouse, parent and organizational member) and so not surprisingly coincide with Schein’s general components of “talents and abilities” and “attitudes and values”. However, it should be said that the managers in this study related their attributes and values to their leader role in particular.

The three-component structure enabled further analysis across contexts, groups (hierarchical levels and gender) and individuals. Contrary to what I had expected, I did not

find any patterns of variation across contexts. McCall and Simmons (1978) have suggested that role identities contain both *conventional* standards and expectations and *personal* elaborations of these conventional contents. I had expected the conventional aspects to be visible in the content of leader identities in the form of context related patterns, e.g., I am a technical leader in TS. However, ‘technical leader’ was a reoccurring description in all four contexts and I found no attributes, values or modes that were more prevalent in one particular context than another. This apparent lack of pattern and the vast variety of leadership mode, attributes, and values conveyed by the managers across contexts, suggests that leader identities may be more idiosyncratic than conventional in content.

Although I found the leader identities to be idiosyncratic there were certain patterns across hierarchical level and gender. I found an indication that attributes such as ‘holistic’ and ‘strategic’ were more often referred to among the most senior managers (CEO and top management level), but a more definitive conclusion would need a quantitative research design and a bigger sample. A comparison across gender among the participants in the in-depth interviews revealed a particular narrative that was only available among women (7 of the 14 female managers in the interviews). When describing their leadership attributes in the form of skills and abilities, these women referred to a common experience. They had been “pushed/invited” into taking on leadership responsibility by someone who believed they had the abilities and skills required to be a good leader. This critical incident was now an important part of “who they were as leaders” and seemed to provide their reflections on leadership attributes with important validation.

There was an interesting pattern of variation across individuals. Six of the managers (BF1, TS14, BF20, BF21, BF22 and TS28) used a particular way of describing who they were as leaders: They stated clearly who they were *not* (e.g., “I am not a Director with a big D.” BF1; “I’m not someone who is very charismatic.” BF20; “I am not a big expert in this field.”

BF 21; “I am not the kind of person who dreams of becoming a leader.” BF22; “I am not someone who’s different from or better than anyone else.” TS28). This ‘not-me’ category indicated that this group was experiencing a particular form of leader identity change. In the next section I will deal more precisely with how the leader identities changed in this group and the others.

Leader identity change

When listening to and reading through the myriad of self-stories offered during the interviews by the 26 managers in role transition, one main theme emerged: the constant comparison of *different selves across time*. In order to describe who they were as leaders the managers presented stories from their past (*old leader selves*), their present (*current leader selves*) and their hoped and feared future (*possible leader selves*), and assembled these stories into constantly evolving leader identities. It seemed that the interview served as a construction site from which they could reconstruct their past, perceive the present and anticipate the future in line with how McAdams has suggested individuals construct identities through evolving and internalized self-stories (McAdams, 2001).

You know, it’s really good that you ask me these questions, because I really need to pay more attention to this. It helps me stop and think before I act, on who I am and want to be as a leader. (PS2)

I will now describe these three temporal selves in more detail before I show how comparing and contrasting selves across time leads to leader identity change in two different ways: a gradual development and a more fundamental reconstruction.

Old selves were made up of stories describing who the managers had been in a variety of previous organizational roles (e.g., subordinate, leader, officer, priest, and engineer) and personal roles (e.g., athlete, scout, and head boy/girl). These old self-stories conveyed

different forms of leadership attributes, values and modes that the managers had developed through the years.

Originally I'm a priest, so I have developed what one refers to as *dulos*, the Greek word for servant. So I bring this servant perspective to the leadership role. I am a facilitator and a problem solver and I carry this with me as part of my luggage. ... I am also a very communicative person so I bring that to my role as a leader. And I can be an action-oriented leader when that is needed. That has to do with my background as a scout and my experience in crisis leadership. (PS10)

Current leader selves consisted of stories concerning their current attempts at leadership in their new role. In addition to stories set in the present, these current leader selves contained leadership mode, attributes and values from their past that they believed were valid although they had not necessarily been fulfilled or validated recently as the managers were facing new superiors, peers and subordinates who needed to be impressed and convinced all over again.

I know from experience that some of my employees will most probably be very challenging, and I will not be granted trust as their leader right away. They will judge me on the way I make decisions and on what information I base my decisions, my leadership style and all of those things. But I have experience, I know I have cracked this code before and so I am calm. I know I cannot show these things in a day or two. They will need to get to know me in time. (PS3)

The term *current leader selves* was chosen to highlight the dynamic and changing character that was prevalent in the managers' accounts of who they were currently being. An alternative term could have been "provisional selves" which has been defined as "temporary solutions people use to bridge the gap between their current capacities and self-conceptions and the representations they hold about what attitudes and behaviors are expected in the new role" (Ibarra, 1999). However, Ibarra's "provisional self" concept contains an important

behavioral element. As I take a *storied-self* perspective I use the term current leader selves to set this concept apart from Ibarra's (1999) behavioral identity interpretation.

Possible leader selves included stories of the leadership modes, attributes and values that the managers aspired to develop and the anti-ideals that they were consciously shying away from. Over the years the managers had been introduced to numerous leaders and now carried these with them in the form of inspiration- and warning-stories that they shared with others and constantly reflected upon.

Through the years you meet people and get great input along the way. Some leaders are particularly good at greeting you, and I feel that does something to me. And I think I have to use this myself. I want to be more like this. But when I'm exhausted I go right to my comfort zone, and forget who I really want to be. But I carry these leaders I have met with me. And yes, there's this one leader in particular, a great leader. Happy, extrovert, charismatic, I'm still in contact with him, a great mentor. He really cares, but he's tough. So he's my role model in many ways. (PS2)

With time you see leaders, both good and bad and you learn from both. For example I had this leader once who would scold people in public. You learn a lot from that. I mean you just don't do that. You just know that there are certain things you just don't want to be part of who you are. (PS11)

Future identities have been researched previously under different labels such as "desired identities" (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009, p. 355), "ideal selves," and "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). "Desired identities" have been conceptualized as story templates or narratives (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) and so should make for an appropriate term for a storied-self interpretation on leader identities. However, as the participants' future selves were divided into both desired and feared self-stories I decided to use "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986) which contains both positive and negative self-definitions.

Changing leader identities. As the managers compared their *current leader selves* with their *old leader selves* and *possible leader selves* they were able to detect, and sometimes create, a gap that allowed for new leader identities to take form via two main mechanisms. The first implied a *gradual* change, as positive aspects of current leadership mode, attributes and values were described as stronger (e.g., more open, communicative, engaging, motivating, calm) and/or negative aspects were described as weaker (e.g., less controlling, showing off, self-absorbed) or vice versa.

I am working hard to hold back some of my passion, because it can be a bit much. I had this coach once who told me that as a top manager I don't need a megaphone to be heard (laughter). I've always had to fight for my ideas, but now I'm becoming slightly more laid-back. (PS9)

This gradual development may have been partly illusionary or a “fantasy” creation as some have suggested (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006, p. 220), since people tend to reconstruct their past in a way that helps enhance current identities in a positive manner (Ashforth, 2001). However, illusionary or not, by comparing stories from their past, present and future, and attempting to patch up potential gaps, their leader identities were changing.

The second form of leader identity development involved a more fundamental change implying that the actual *content* of what it meant to be a leader was altered. While comparing who they were currently being as leaders with their past and potential future, the managers would *add, replace, lose* and/or *shed* self-in-role meanings (leadership attributes, values and mode) to their evolving leader self-stories.

Burke (2006) suggested that identities change in two very similar ways: “by changes in the strength of response along a given dimension, (e.g., how ‘task-oriented’ one is as a leader), and by changes in which dimensions are relevant for a particular identity (e.g., changing what it means to be a leader from considering levels of task-orientation to perhaps considering levels of dominance”) (Burke, 2006, p. 82). During the data analysis I realized

that Burke's two proposed ways of change were also present in my data. However, while Burke (2006) proposed both forms in his theory, he only addressed changes in strength and kept the dimensions (i.e., content) fixed, urging future research to attend to them. I will now describe my empirical findings regarding this second form of change in more detail.

Adding new content to what it meant to be a leader was the first of the four ways through which I found the leader identities changed fundamentally. The managers described their leadership experience from various contexts such as political, military, other organizational cultures, and lower hierarchical levels, each of which had required slightly different leadership modes, attributes and values from them. The managers added newly acquired stories of who they were currently being as leaders to these recollected leader selves.

Brown has likened collective organizational identities to a "patchwork quilt of narrative episodes stitched together" (Brown, 2006, p. 735). Brown's metaphor helps describe how the managers patched episodes together into a colorful and constantly growing "leader identity quilt". Elaborating on this metaphor, each patch (contextual story) had a slightly different color and texture to it (different content and degrees of strength) as they had been manufactured in different contexts (e.g., military, church, school, etc.). Thus, as new patches were added, the overall appearance of the leader identity quilt changed.

I became a kind of speech-giving, inspirational leader very early on, when I started out as a youth politician. In my political party leadership was a lot about giving really good speeches. I mean we had to get people to want to work for free, and rather help out in the office than focus on their exams. I've had a lot of other leadership roles since then. Today I'm in the top management team of a bank, and my subordinates have worked in this bank for thirty years and are a lot older than me and know their stuff really well. I'm supposed to lead them and I don't really understand all of the abbreviations that they use and I don't stand a chance in coming up with any real solutions. So the other day I'm in this meeting and I think I'll be a sort of facilitator and I started asking them: What do you think is the best solution? What is your recommendation? And now I've become this facilitating leader. But I still get to give inspirational speeches. (BF6)

The managers would also add new content to their evolving leader selves by looking to the future. While it was most common to describe who they were hoping to become by drawing upon stories involving people they had actually met (e.g., “I am aspiring to be a caring leader who is also authoritative, like this leader I once had.” PS2), a few managers would also use stories about well-known public leaders.

It may sound a bit silly, but I want to become more like the people I admire. I mean not copy, but approach their skills, mind-set and qualities. I have this personal motto that I work toward: “Yes I can, I care, I dare!” Each of these slogans represents a famous role model. I guess it started out with Obama, who said “Yes I can!” (BF16)

However, it was not always possible to simply add new aspects to their growing leader identities. Sometimes old forms of self-in-role meanings had to be taken out and *replaced* with new forms. A reoccurring turning point story described the moment the managers had come to realize that being a leader meant working ‘through’ others and facilitating other people’s growth rather than showing off their own technical competence. For many, this particular story marked the time and place where they had replaced aspects of their old identities (e.g., the technical expert who leads on the side) with new aspects (e.g., the motivating leader who helps others grow), which resulted in changed leader identities.

Today I identify with being a leader, but I have experienced what it’s like to be a leader on the side, you know? To be kind of walking beside myself. I’ve experienced that in previous roles. But this leader part of me is more fused in with the rest of me now. It started when I became a team-manager for the first time. I was really a consultant and was supposed to be a “leader” on the side. But really, I was a consultant all the time. And then I got a new position as manager for the whole department, and I thought to myself, now you have to lead other managers. You can no longer lean only on your technical expertise. You really need to get what it means to lead, to motivate others. That’s when I understood I had to start looking at myself as a leader. (BF25)

While most of the managers talked of this turning point in the past tense, two managers (BF20 and BF22) seemed to be right in the middle of it. These two (who were part of the ‘not-me’ group mentioned in the data analysis section) were consciously contemplating whether being a ‘full time leader’ was in fact who they wanted to be as this might require replacing parts of their old identities with new ones.

I’m an operative leader. I’m very hands-on. But I’m not sure if I really identify with being a “Leader”. I’m not sure if I am one thing or another, but this job is about doing what I find interesting and challenging. I guess I could have found these challenges in another role as well, without having to be a leader. So I do not feel becoming a leader is a calling to me, but I guess there are things one could learn. Because I’m not a person who... I mean I guess I am pretty outgoing and good at building relations, but from that to being engaging, I mean having the ability to engage people requires different skills. Skills I have not developed, enough ... yet... that is what I am hoping I will learn on this leadership program I’ve signed up for, I guess I will learn, ... I mean like communication, and develop people, and like coaching. (BF20)

Four other managers in this study (all part of the ‘not-me’ group) were given less choice in the matter and were all facing a *loss* of important aspects of their leader identities. The first of these four (BF21) was experiencing that his current leadership performance fell short of and differed qualitatively from the role expectations of some of his subordinates. As a result the manager felt forced to reconsider who he was as a leader.

Because when you get fairly sharp feedback, both implicit and explicit, that the way you enact leadership is not how they want it or the way it used to be, you know? When what you believe in and what you do is really challenged, then you start questioning yourself. Am I really doing things the right way? And should I have faith enough to do what I do regardless, or sit down and rethink it all? ... They challenge my core beliefs, who I am and how I do things as a leader. (BF21)

This manager used to perceive himself as a “competent and action-oriented leader” but now he felt neither. In their book on RIT McCall and Simmons suggest that stories of one’s

past only offer “short term credit” (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 92). So if there is a discrepancy that is dangerously large during a single encounter or fairly large during a series of encounters individuals will experience serious problems of legitimation of their role identities (McCall & Simmons, 1978). This manager seemed to experience both forms of discrepancy and consequently faced a major identity threat. During the interview he reconstructed who he was in terms of what he lacked: in technical skills (“I am a little league player in terms of finance”) and in leadership mode (“I am attempting to facilitate and coach them, but they expect me to be an expert and sparring partner. I cannot do that yet.”). And although he held on hard to his core values, even these seemed to be up for reevaluation (“I believe in giving everyone a chance to grow, but I can see their point”). Going back to the two aforementioned forms of leader identity change, this managers’ current leader identity was changing in *strength* (I am less competent, less coaching) and in *content* as new requirements of leadership attributes (finance expert), values (inequality) and mode (sparring partner) were added and resulted in the loss of old elements (competent, equal opportunities, and coaching).

Three other managers (TS14, BF1 and TS28, all part of the ‘not-me’ group) were also faced with the probability of losing aspects of their leader identities. The first of these three felt challenged by a peer in terms of how she enacted her role. Fortunately, she felt supported by her superior and other colleagues and so did not perceive this to be an overwhelming threat. She did, however, spend a more than average portion of the interview recounting who she had been in the past and hoped to be in the future, maybe as a way of reconstructing a current self that would sustain attacks from her challenging colleague. The other two managers did not feel challenged in terms of leadership attributes or mode, but feared losing core values. They were part of their top management team and their roles did not allow them to fully enact core values such as “equality” and being “one of the rest” on a regular basis.

This seemed to have triggered the construction of new leader identities containing elements of ‘who they were not.’

I am very aware that first of all I am Anna (pseudonym). I have not become a director in my head. I have fought hard against feeling better than others. It is easy to start feeling high above the rest because your role and your competence are important and so you are important. But this role doesn’t change who I am or what I value. And this is extremely important to me, because I have seen people who become directors with a big D. If your identity is so tied up in this role and you fail, you have nothing left. I will not lose myself... I identify with being a leader, but I am different. I am not better than others. I represent something different. (BF1)

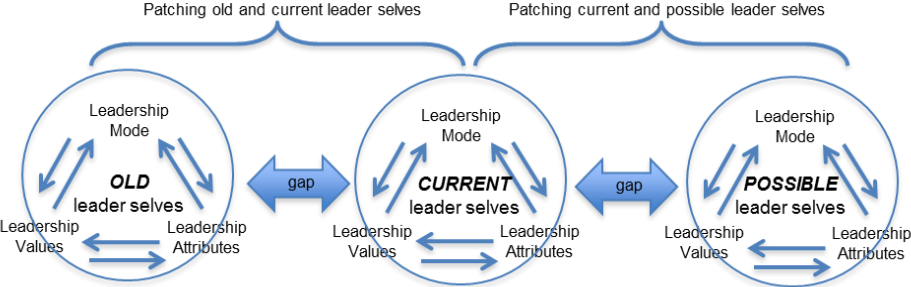
While losing and fearing the loss of valued parts of leader identities was associated with tension, *shedding* old and failed selves was associated with laughter and relief. Letting go of old selves that no longer fitted was the fourth and final way I found that allowed managers to change the content of their leader identities. Many of the managers offered stories of “learning from failure” and constructed their current leader identities by contrasting today against a failed past.

Some time back when I was in a previous managerial role, my husband had a really lousy boss, and he talked a lot about her, and when I heard him talking about her I realized he was talking about me. I mean I did a lot of the very same stupid things. And I saw how terribly frustrated my husband became. My god, what if they think I’m just as stupid? (Laughter) So I started opening up and now I’m a completely different leader. Now I’m thinking that my most important role is to unleash the powers within those around me. (BF6)

Theoretical model

Summing up the findings relating to my three research questions, I suggest leader identities are made up of stories that contain three forms of self-in-leader-role meanings: leadership mode, leadership attributes, and leadership values. I find a large variety in the

content of these three forms of self-meaning across individuals and so suggest that leader identities are more idiosyncratic than conventional in nature. I propose that leader identities change as managers compare their *current leader selves* against their *old leader selves* and *possible leader selves* and detect and/or construct a gap. While the managers attempt to patch up these gaps they reconstruct new leader identities in two ways: First by describing a strengthening/weakening of already existing self-in-role meanings (e.g., more/less optimistic; more/less honest; more/less coaching), which implies a gradual change along the same dimensions. And second, by adding (e.g., inspirational *and* facilitative); replacing (e.g., *from* technical expert *to* supportive coach); losing (e.g., “I am *no longer* competent”) and/or shedding (e.g., *leaving* behind controlling and micro-managing self) self-in-role-meanings, which implies a more fundamental change of content. Figure 2 summarizes the three-component structure and shows how patching up gaps between old, current and possible leader selves changes leader identities in the two abovementioned ways.



Patching gaps changes leader identities in two ways:

- 1) Gradual change:
 - +/- same dimension
- 2) Fundamental (self-meaning) change:
 - Adding - Replacing
 - Losing - Shedding

Figure 2: Developing leader identities

Discussion

The objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of the content of leader identities, the relative proportion of their idiosyncratic and conventional dimensions and how leader identities change. With the use of an inductive multiple-case research design, two forms of data collection (in-depth interviews and an open questionnaire) and employing two identity perspectives in particular, a storied-self (McAdams, 1996) and self-in-role meaning (Ashforth, 2001; Burke, 2006; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; McCall & Simmons, 1978), this study contributes to leader IT and practice in several ways.

Theoretical implications

First, I propose a three-component structure of leader identities consisting of three forms of self-in-leader role meanings (leadership mode, attributes and values) that are conveyed through stories. This structure complements simpler leader identity definitions, such as, seeing/thinking of oneself as a leader (Day & Sin, 2011; DeRue et al., 2009; Lord & Hall, 2005) or varying degrees of “identification” with the leader role (Waldman, Galvin, & Walumbwa, 2013, p. 159). Leader identities are believed to operate as interpretive structures that help individuals organize, give meaning and access to memory relevant for effective leadership (Lord & Hall, 2005; van Knippenberg et al., 2005) and are believed to explain leadership behaviors (Rus et al., 2010). A more detailed understanding of the content of these leader identities may therefore advance our knowledge of their function in leadership.

Weick once suggested that: “The more selves I have access to, the more meanings I should be able to extract and impose in any situation” (Weick, 1995, p. 24). Future research could explore if a large variety of self-in-role meanings enables choice and freedom and maybe facilitates change. Could it be that leader identities that are complex enable individuals to operate as effective change catalysts in the way Akrivou and Bradbury-Huang (2011) have proposed? And could the potential benefits of complex leader identities perhaps depend upon

the level of congruency within (modes, attributes and values) due to an individual's need for "integrity" and "self-coherence" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 58)? These represent interesting avenues for future research.

This three-component structure also complements leader identity definitions and measures that contain elements of being prototypical of the leader role (Rus et al., 2010) and may prove particularly helpful when addressing individuals who do not necessarily perceive themselves to be typical leaders (e.g., female leaders, Ely et al. (2011); Ibarra et al. (2014)), but who may still have a "definition of self-in-role" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 6) that influences how they engage in leadership and develop as leaders.

Second, the empirical findings presented in this study provide insights into the multitude of leader self-stories and descriptions that managers use to construct and reconstruct a sense of leader self and address this field's need for more empirical studies (Muir, 2012). The unexpected lack of patterns of variation in content across contexts and the large variety across individuals revealed, suggests that leader identities may be more idiosyncratic than conventional in nature. This was surprising as the two most popular identity theories in management studies, SIT (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and IT (Burke, 1980; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000) explain the development of social/role identities as the result of individuals incorporating attributes from their social category (SIT) or role (IT) into their sense of self. If this were so for leader identities, we should have expected a bigger conventional dimension.

However, suggesting that leader identities are more idiosyncratic than conventional in content coincides with DeRue and colleagues who believe leader identities should be understood as "particularly ambiguous" personal (rather than social) identities (DeRue et al., 2009, p. 222). It may be that the large idiosyncratic dimension comes from the managers' need to improvise using their character traits while trying to adapt to vague and ambiguous

leader role expectations like McCall and Simmons (1978) suggested is typical for social roles, in their role identity theory (RIT). As a consequence I suggest RIT (McCall & Simmons, 1978) offers a particularly interesting starting point for future leader identity studies wishing to expand our knowledge of leader identities and how they change.

Third, I propose that leader identities change via two main mechanisms: through a re-evaluation of strength along the same self-meaning dimensions, and through a more fundamental change of content as managers add, replace, lose and/or shed self-in-role meanings. I advance Burke's (2006) theory on identity change through a storied-self interpretation (McAdams, 1996), and the empirical insights of this study add to Burke's (2006) suggested "task-orientation" dimension by suggesting a number of other relevant self-in-leader role meanings (e.g., coaching, sparring partner, facilitator, team-player, visionary, goal-, conflict-, solution-, people-oriented, operational, technical, empowering and involving) to explore further.

Future research could extend this theorizing on leader identity change by exploring when and under what conditions the content of the three related self-in-leader role meanings change fundamentally. The findings of this study support previous research that suggests identities are influenced by one's role performance (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and happen in response to persistent pressure (Burke, 2006) and social validation (or lack thereof) (Ashforth, 2001; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Pratt, 2013). Future research could investigate what forms of leader role performance (e.g., success, failure, experience, learning, lack of role enactment) lead to different changes (via adding, replacing, losing and shedding meaning). Such an advancement would incorporate into this theorizing more of what Singer refers to as the "building blocks of ongoing identity" (Singer, 2004, p. 442), which are the episodes and critical moments that provide a basis for story creation.

Future research could also investigate what types of persistent pressures and social validation (e.g., feedback, promotion, being granted trust, support through coaching/mentoring) lead to different changes of self-meaning content. For example, could the potential loss of content following failure or being hindered from enacting certain aspects of one's leader identities, be countered through supportive feedback? Does it matter what type of feedback the managers receive? Building on Dweck's (2000) research on "self-theories" one could explore if "learning oriented" feedback (focusing on strategy, effort and the managers' potential for growth) influences the creation of leader identities differently than "performance oriented" feedback (focusing on outcome and being better than others). This would add the crucial role of others (e.g., superiors, peers, subordinates, mentors and coaches) to the leader identity construction process, supplementing our understanding with complementary self-theories and advancing our understanding of how leader identities develop.

Fourth, although leader identities may be personal and idiosyncratic, the findings of this study suggest that they are not the sole creation of managers. In the managers' descriptions of leadership attributes (e.g., courageous, optimistic, calm and confident) we recognize elements from the "trait approach" to leadership that addresses the personal qualities and characteristics of leaders (Parry & Bryman, 2006, p. 448). When they present who they are in terms of leadership mode (e.g., "I am a people-oriented leader who coaches my subordinates toward growth and leads through compelling visions") and values (e.g., "I believe in equality and I need to be authentic and true to my values"), we may detect other leadership trends such as "the style approach" and "the new leadership approach" (Parry & Bryman, 2006, p. 450), in addition to "authentic leadership" theory (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Thus it is clear that the leadership mode, attributes and values that the managers convey through their leader self-stories, are influenced by different leadership discourses in line with

what the critical stream of leader identity research has suggested (Sinclair, 2011). And as leadership trends change we may expect leader identities to change in the same way.

And finally, I suggest that a “storied-self” perspective (McAdams, 1996, p. 295) may further our understanding of leader identities and argue that it represents a bridging lens across opposing streams of leader identity research. The stories offered by the managers in this study reveal that leader identities are influenced by leadership discourse and contain complexity, ambiguity and contradictions in the way critical management studies have argued. At the same time, the findings of my study propose that managers integrate their stories into a coherent leader identity and so also acknowledge the assumptions of coherence and agency found in the “positive” stream of research. Thus understanding leader identities as evolving self-stories (McAdams, 1996) allows for both streams of research to contribute to a more nuanced whole. Despite the many advantages of taking such a narrative/stories’ perspective on leader identities, organizational research has not paid adequate attention to narrative forms of constructing work identities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). My study addresses this gap by contributing empirical content and theorizing that advances our understanding of leader identities as evolving leader self-stories.

Practical implications

The empirical findings and theorizing also hold practical implications for managers and organizations. Ely and colleagues have suggested that if leader identities are left unattended they may divert attention and energy away from the purpose of leadership (Ely et al., 2011). Thus paying attention to leader identities and how they change may prove helpful not only for individuals who struggle to create and recreate a sense of leader self, but also for their organizations who want effective leadership.

Organizations wishing to address leader identities may do so through identity-based leader development programs (Ibarra et al., 2010). The theorizing of this study may provide a

foundation on which to build such a program. For example, participants may be asked to find examples of leadership experience, critical incidents, epiphanies, surprises, turning points and memorable messages (Ashforth, 2012) that have influenced who they are as leaders today before attending the leader development program. The participants may be invited to reflect upon these collected stories in smaller groups or dyads using the three-component structure and two mechanisms of change offered in this study, as a framework for assisted reflection.

Facilitating a conscious ‘dissection’ of leader identities into leadership modes, attributes and values and asking the participants to reflect upon their past, present and possible future, may perhaps result in new epiphanies and insights. The managers may become aware of old self-descriptions that still have an unconscious hold on how they perceive themselves, and they may want to choose to shed these. The participants may come to realize that there are aspects of their leader identities they have not used in a while that they may want to re-ignite, or there may be possible selves they want to take on. The program facilitators may provide the managers with exercises where they can experiment with different approaches to leadership to expand their ideas of what feels ‘true’ and help them write these new leadership modes into their evolving leader self-stories.

Assisted support on leader identity reflection may be particularly important during role transitions. Although the managers who were interviewed in this study had on average spent more than a decade in various leader roles, they were still (consciously and unconsciously) reflecting on who they were as leaders and some were struggling. This highlights the importance of assisting not only individuals who are newcomers to the leadership role but also experienced managers. Individualized support, challenge, and feedback offered in the form of leadership coaching (one-on-one counseling about work-related issues with the purpose of improving leadership effectiveness, Ladegård and Gjerde (2014)) using the theorizing of this study as a framework for reflection, may perhaps help managers settle more

quickly into new roles and ensure energy is not diverted unnecessarily toward oneself and away from the purpose of leadership.

And finally, reminding individuals who take on leadership responsibility that our identities consist of a multitude of selves (Ashforth, 2001; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Mead, 1934) may perhaps facilitate the positive identity development spiral that Day and colleagues describe (Day, 2013; Day & Harrison, 2007; Day et al., 2009) as managers become aware of the vast amount of selves they can draw upon in their creation of leader identities. Furthermore, seeing leader identities as consisting of many selves, may perhaps ease the potential tension found in critical management studies (e.g., Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) as managers feel less obliged to be “one true leader self”.

Limitations and future research

As with all qualitative studies, there is a trade-off between stories and constructs (Eisenhardt, 1991). The goal of this explorative, multiple-case study was to cast new light on the content of leader identities and theorize around how they change. Thus priority was given to building theoretical concepts while limited descriptions are provided as illustrating quotes.

In addition, some caution must be exercised in using multiple cases to generalize to other groups and contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989). First, the participants in this study were for the most part experienced managers. Thus the suggested three-component structure may not necessarily apply to novice leaders. Lord and Hall have suggested that the leader identities of experienced managers differ from novices, as identities shift from individual, to relational and finally more collective orientations with experience (Lord & Hall, 2005). Furthermore, we may assume that individuals who are new to the leadership role have less developed stories about their leadership mode compared with experienced managers. Future research could advance our knowledge of the three-component structure by comparing leader self-stories offered by individuals new to the leader role with those of experienced managers.

Second, the study was conducted in Norway. Norway is part of the Nordic cluster that is characterized by lower power distance and higher individualism (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) both of which may have influenced the empirical findings of this study. First, the lower power distance suggests less emphasis is put on rules and procedures (Dickson et al., 2003). This may have enabled the managers to engage in a more individualized approach to leadership and thus allowed for more idiosyncratic identities to evolve. Furthermore, individuals high on individualism (which is common in western countries) want to see themselves as different from others. Although Norway is in the cluster of “horizontal individualism” (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) implying individuals “desire to be unique among equal others” (Dickson et al., 2003, p. 743), they still place an emphasis on uniqueness, which may have influenced the big idiosyncratic dimension. To advance our understanding future research could compare conventional and idiosyncratic dimensions across cultures with varying degrees of power distance and collectivism.

Finally, I have argued that a merged “storied-self” (McAdams, 1996) and “self-meaning” (Ashforth, 2001; Burke, 2006; McCall & Simmons, 1978) perspective on leader identities offers a theoretical lens that may help to integrate opposing streams of leader identity research. However, there may be a danger involved in seeking such a middle ground. In much the same way that “identity as a life story” (McAdams, 1987) may be perceived as “too positivist and reductionist for the social constructionists and too literary and diffuse for the trait enthusiasts” of psychology (Singer, 2004, p. 445), the theorizing of this study may be vulnerable from both directions. Nevertheless, it is my hope that such a merged perspective may offer a step toward integrating opposing assumptions and descriptions into a more nuanced whole that may benefit both theory and practice.

Conclusion

The new emerging stream of leader identity research is lacking in empirical studies addressing the content of leader identities (Muir, 2012), and is characterized by opposing assumptions (Sinclair, 2011) and descriptions leading to confusion and questions among theorists and practitioners alike. The objective of this study is not to offer any definitive answers, but to advance our understanding of the content of leader identities, their idiosyncratic and conventional dimensions, and how they develop by providing empirical insights, theorizing and opening up for integration across streams of thought. This study contributes to theory by offering complementary perspectives on the concept of leader identities, their content and mechanisms for change that may advance our understanding of how individuals engage in leadership and develop as leaders. This study also contributes to practice by suggesting ways to offer identity-based leader development and leadership coaching which may help individuals in leader roles gain a sense of control by bringing themselves into line with events that happen in the role through the development of role identities (Ashforth, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2003) benefitting individuals and organizations alike.

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your new job.
2. We are now going to reflect upon the term “leader role.” How do you understand this term?
3. In what way is this leader role different from your previous one?
4. How are you experiencing the transition from your previous leader role to this one?
5. What reactions (if any) are you experiencing in relation to this role change regarding your identity, values, and behavior?
6. What does it mean to “master this new leader role”?
7. What do you find challenging in this new job?
8. What do you do to meet these challenges?
9. What does it mean to be a leader in your organization?
10. Before you took this leadership job, how well did you think you would fit this leader role?
11. Now that you have started in this job, how well do you find you and the role fit each other?
12. What will be important in the future?
13. Who/what influences your leader role and you as a leader?
14. What would you stress as most important of all that we have been talking about?

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CHAPTER 6

PAPER 3

*Crafting the leader role: Strategies and dynamics of leader role and leader identities in
creating person-to-role fit*

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Crafting the leader role: Strategies and dynamics of leader role and leader identities in creating person-to-role fit

Abstract. In this article we explore how experienced managers in new positions attempt to create a fit between who they are as leaders and the leader role they are expected to enact. Based upon analysis of interviews with 28 senior managers and drawing upon role and identity theories, we develop a theory of *role crafting*. We present four sets of role crafting strategies applied by the managers aiming to create a person-to-role fit: *present* (inform and demonstrate), *adapt* (comply and moderate behavior), *challenge* (persuade and oppose) and *explore* (experiment with old and new forms of role enactment). We find that leader identities both facilitate and hinder the role crafting process and explain how this happens by using three suggested metaphors: *guide*, *anchor* and *bouncing wall*. We discuss ways that role crafting contributes to the leader role and identity literature, suggest avenues for future research, and propose ideas for helping managers master the leader role.

Introduction

Executive managers face what may seem a paradoxical dilemma (“when options are contradictory and interrelated such that any choice between them is temporary and tension will resurface” (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 387)). They cannot simply “be themselves” at work, but are expected to act as a voice of their organization (Watson, 2008, p. 122) and to meet role expectations in order to be perceived as effective (Fondas & Stewart, 1994; Tsui, 1984; Tsui, Ashford, St. Clair, & Xin, 1995). At the same time, they must present themselves as credible and authentic or they will be unable to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships that are vital for successful job performance (Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Watson, 2008).

This challenging dilemma is particularly salient when a manager takes on a new position and needs to establish her/himself as a leader (Denis, Langley, & Pineault, 2000). The manager may have a well-defined idea about who s/he is as a leader (i.e., a leader identity) and how s/he interprets the leader role (i.e., role conception) (Levinson, 1959). However, the subordinates may have role expectations based on the predecessor, need for change, or other unknown preferences that are ambiguous or even detrimental to the manager’s leader identity and leader role conception. Facing the dilemma of adapting to new role expectations or maintaining authenticity the manager may ask: *How can I craft my leader role so that it is compatible with my leader identity? And if I need to change, how much can I change without losing my authenticity?* How the manager deals with this challenge, may be crucial for later job success.

Role transition theory suggests that people adapt to a new role with the aim of creating compatibility between the person and their immediate context, labeled person-to-role fit (Ashforth & Saks, 1995; Nicholson, 1984). Through the adaptation process the person and/or the role may change and the theory attempts to predict to what magnitude they develop. The result of the adaptation process is categorized into four modes of work adjustment that are

defined as more/less personal development and more/less role development (Ashforth & Saks, 1995; Nicholson, 1984). However, empirical evidence has shown that it is difficult to model consistent predictors of these changes across studies and settings (Ashforth & Saks, 1995).

This study explores how experienced managers attend to role development by engaging in a process we refer to as *role crafting*. Building on role theories (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Levinson, 1959; Turner, 2006) and identity theories (Ashforth, 2001; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; McAdams, 1996; McCall & Simmons, 1987), we explore role crafting as an interactive process between the manager's leader identity and leader role conception, and their simultaneous response to and adjustment of subordinates' leader role expectations.

We understand *leader identity* as the internalized and evolving self-story that individuals tell themselves and others to describe who they are as leaders. We interpret the *leader role* as pre-existing and emerging expectations of leadership tasks/duties (e.g., define goals), attitudes (e.g., long term perspective) and behaviors (e.g., consideration) that are linked to a managerial position. We also acknowledge the existence of informal leader roles.

Roles and identities are believed to influence each other (McCall & Simmons, 1987). When an individual assumes a leader role, the role feeds back on their identity (Lord, Hannah, & Jennings, 2011) and through a process of "identification" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 20) the individual may take prototypical characteristics belonging to the role as their own (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The influence process also works in the opposite way, so that when an individual expresses their identity through role enactment their identities may affect role development by altering role expectations (Ashforth, 2001; McCall & Simmons, 1987; Nicholson, 1984).

However, despite a general agreement that both roles and identities interact and change during role adaptation, the organizational literature has been predominantly occupied with the individual's identity construction emanating from their enactment of organizational

roles (e.g., Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Beech, 2008; Brocklehurst, Grey, & Sturdy, 2010; Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Down & Reveley, 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) while understanding how identity influences the development of roles has been left largely unexplored (two valuable exceptions are Petriglieri & Stein (2012) and Vough, Cardador, Bednar, Dane & Pratt (2013)). This persistent attention to identity over role may give the impression that when organizational members adapt to roles they are mainly concerned with changing aspects of their selves, while in many cases their behavior may be aimed at changing the social structure to leave more room for enacting their identities.

Taking the experienced manager's perspective we investigate the dynamic process of role construction and pay particular attention to the behavioral strategies they employ and the part leader identities play during this process. We address two research questions. First, what role crafting strategies will managers use in order to attempt to create person-to-role fit? Here we make the implicit assumption that managers actually strive for a person-to-role fit as a basis for performing their leader role effectively (Stets & Burke, 2003; Turner, 2006). Second, we ask how will the managers' leader identities influence these role crafting strategies?

The aim of this study is to develop a theory of strategies for creating person-to-role fit that attends to both role and identity. For this purpose we conducted an explorative, qualitative study using a multiple-case research design (Eisenhardt, 1989) and performed 28 in-depth interviews with managers in role transition from four different contexts (military, public service, bank/finance and technology services). The study contributes to different streams of literature that attend to the leader role and leader identity through its empirical findings and theorizing, addressing ways that individuals attempt to influence their social environment to enable successful role enactment.

We will now give a brief description of the leader role and leader identity concepts before we present how previous theories have described similar ways of creating a person-to-role fit by addressing role expectations.

Leader role, leader identity and role crafting

The leader role: There are two main interpretations of role in the organizational literature: a structuralist (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Mintzberg, 1973) and an interactionist perspective (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 2006). According to the structuralist view the leader role may be understood as a set of predefined leadership tasks, activities and behaviors, linked to a management position such as giving direction and purpose to the organization (McCall & Segrist, 1978; Mintzberg, 1973; Shamir & Howell, 1999), facilitating subordinates' growth (McCall & Segrist, 1978; Tsui, 1984), and introducing structural change and improvisation to keep the organization going (Katz & Kahn, 1966). These pre-existing role expectations are communicated or sent to the managers by individuals who have a stake in their role performance such as superiors, peers and subordinates (role set) (Katz & Kahn, 1966). The managers receive the role and will either conform to or deviate from the sent role in their role performance (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Tsui, 1984).

Interaction role theories (Stryker, 2006; Turner, 2006) suggest a more dynamic understanding of the leader role. The interactionist perspective interprets the role as patterns of behavior that arise from the interaction as individuals create and modify roles through a role-taking, role-playing and role-making process (Turner, 2006). Identities are believed to play an important part during the role-making process (Turner, 2006), especially for experienced role incumbents who will attempt to develop a version of the role that matches their role conception and who they are (abilities, traits and characteristics) (Thornton & Nardi, 1975). Thus, emerging, socially constructed leader roles will create social individuals who go

on to (re-)create social structure in an ongoing reciprocal process (Kanter, 1977; Weick, 1979).

We take a “middle range position” between the structuralist and interactionist perspectives, where both views are integrated (Ashforth, 2001, p. 4). We believe that leader roles are partly stable and exist in the form of predefined leadership tasks, duties, attitudes and behaviors as roles tend to become institutionalized within organizations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). At the same time we believe that leader roles come alive and develop as managers attempt to express valued identities (Ashforth, 2001; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and enact their own leader role conception (Levinson, 1959) while their behavior is influenced by superiors, peers and subordinates (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975). We explore how the managers address the leader role expectations of their subordinates and the part leader identity plays during this process.

We see the term leader role as more inclusive than leadership role. Whereas *leadership* role tends to evoke the association of leadership behaviors aimed to influence, e.g., change, we suggest the *leader* role also includes a “social role” that is associated with a set of normative and anticipatory expectations (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 64) of the person who occupies the managerial position in the form of attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors.

Leader identities: Leader identity has been defined as “thinking of oneself as a leader” (Day & Sin, 2011, p. 547) and “having a self-view as a leader” (Lord & Hall, 2005, p. 594). We take a more elaborate interpretation and see leader identity not only as identification with *being* a leader but also as the contextualized understanding of *who* one is as a leader. We believe that identities are not to be found in behavior (Giddens, 1991), but that behavior provides the individual with experience that helps them narrate an evolving story to explain to themselves and others who they are (McAdams, 1996). Consequently, we see leader identities as *internal* narrative constructions (influenced by discourse and social interaction) that belong

to the individual who narrates them. And we see leader roles as *external* expectations of behavior, attitudes and tasks that are contextually derived and that belong to a position.

Splitting role and identity into external expectations and internal self-meaning stories facilitates our task of exploring how leader roles and leader identities interact. While it is becoming more common to take a behavioral perspective on work identities (e.g. Ibarra, 1999) failing to distinguish between role and identity in terms of behavior may blur the two concepts making it more difficult to see how one influences the other. Furthermore, a blurring of role and identity may also result in the misinterpretation of why individuals behave the way they do when entering a new position, suggesting they try to construct new identities when they may be attempting to construct new roles.

Role crafting is a recently suggested term by Ashforth (2012). He defines it as the process of innovation or modification of “role-related expectations, ranging from minor tweaks to major changes” (Ashforth, 2012, p. 162). Ashforth likens role crafting to similar concepts such as role development (Ashforth & Saks, 1995; Nicholson, 1984), role innovation (Nicholson & West, 1988), and role making (Graen, 1976; Turner, 1962). These theories on role development attend to the conditions and constraints of the role (e.g., role-discretion: latitude to alter task-related characteristics and role novelty: degree to which the role permits use of prior knowledge) and of the role constituent (e.g., desire for control or feedback) (Ashforth & Saks, 1995). However, while these theories take a macro perspective on role development and aim to predict different forms of role innovation (Ashforth & Saks, 1995), the objective of our theorizing is to gain a micro perspective of the role crafting process by attending to the actual strategies employed.

Managers who meet the expectations of their role set gain a reputation for being effective (Tsui, 1984). Consequently managers may be motivated to comply with or try to alter the expectations of others in order to be perceived as effective. In a theory of

expectations enactment Fondas and Stewart describe how managers create and change role expectations by complying, ignoring and modifying them (Fondas & Stewart, 1994, p. 83). In his research, Kotter (1982) observed that effective managers actively negotiate goals and agendas with their constituencies. However, a study that tested strategies managers used to address role expectations, found that managers who attempted to avoid and change others' expectations were perceived negatively in terms of effectiveness (Tsui et al., 1995). Only managers who addressed a discrepancy between role expectations and own role performance by exerting extra effort and explaining decisions were perceived as effective (Tsui et al., 1995). These results suggest that attempting to influence roles by addressing role expectations may be a complicated matter.

Method

In order to explore role crafting strategies and the part leader identities play, we applied an inductive, multiple-case research design (Eisenhardt, 1989) and interviewed 28 experienced, senior managers from four different organizational contexts in Norway. Comparing multiple cases across different contexts may improve theory building by helping reveal relevant concepts and their relations (Bryman, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Context, participants, data collection, and analysis

Contexts: The military, public service, banking/finance, and technology service were chosen through purposeful sampling to represent two extreme contexts or “polar types” (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990) that vary along two main criteria: preparation time for role transition and explicit leader role expectations. We chose technology service as one extreme context due to the short time allowed to prepare for a new managerial role (an average of two weeks) and the loosely defined leader role expectations. The military was chosen as the other extreme due to its long preparation time (six months) and a very explicit

set of predefined leader role expectations. Public service and banking/finance were chosen to represent contexts in between these two extremes.

Participants: We contacted HR directors in organizations that represented our chosen contexts asking for participants to our study. The HR directors (from banking/finance, technology services and the public service) were given a list of selection criteria: leadership experience (from a minimum of three previous managerial positions with leadership responsibility which we defined as personnel responsibility), recent role transition (from one to six months), and tenure with the organization (a minimum of one year's employment). The HR directors provided us with email addresses for potential participants who met our selection criteria. The participants from the military were recruited based upon 'snowball sampling' i.e., participants in the study were asked to name potential candidates. We approached the potential participants through an email saying that we were looking for individuals who had recently entered a new position with leadership responsibility. Everyone who was approached agreed to participate in the study.

Leadership experience was chosen as a selection criterion to augment the chances that the participating managers had experience dealing with changing role expectations to which they could compare their current role change. Furthermore, Pratt and colleagues (Pratt et al., 2006) have suggested that as people gain experience in their work they may shift their emphasis from identity construction to role innovation. As we wished to explore strategies for addressing role development, collecting data from experienced managers was particularly suitable for our purpose. All the participants met this criterion (their experience ranged from three to seven previous positions with leadership responsibility).

To help provide fresh insights on role and identity that were not limited by retrospective accounts, the managers should be new to their leader role. Twenty-six of the 28 managers met this criterion. The two participants from the military were for safety and

practical reasons interviewed after their assignment in a war zone was completed. This represents a potential limitation of the study to which we will return. To ensure that reflections about the role crafting process were related to the actual role transition and not to the socialization process of entering a new organization, the managers had to change roles from within the same organization. All 28 managers met this criterion.

Due to our strict selection criteria, the managers were not equally dispersed across all four contexts. Two were from the military, seven from public service, 15 from banking/finance, and four from technology service. Among the 28 participant managers 15 were women and 13 were men, nine of the managers held top management positions (e.g., CEO and HR director) and 19 upper middle management positions (e.g., bank manager). Their age was between 28 and 62 with the majority in their mid- to late forties.

Data collection: Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted in the late spring of 2012 and spring 2013. The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. To ensure that the interviews were effectuated in a similar manner one interviewer (author 1) performed all 28 interviews. The questions of the interview guide (Appendix 1) helped structure the interview, but the participants were urged to follow their own pace and interest so the questions were not necessarily answered in the same order. Extensive handwritten notes were taken during the interviews to allow for immediate analysis. The interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim to enable further analysis with the use of a software program (QDAMiner). The transcribed interviews comprise a total of 455 pages of single spaced typing.

We acknowledge that a researcher may not be impartial or without an “interpretative frame of reference” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). Thus we tried to stay reflexive about our own role during the data collection and analysis by writing diary notes reflecting on assumptions and taking minutes from our ongoing analytical discussions that were consulted during our

data analysis. Furthermore, in order not to get caught up in proving any particular theory we drew upon a wide variety of theories (role theory, identity theory, social identity theory, role identity theory, identity construction, leader identity construction, identity work) that served as “sensitizing concepts” that were used to guide our search and interpretation during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2005, p. 31).

Data analysis: The data were analyzed in three stages. During the first stage, which progressed in parallel with the data collection, we assigned open codes to the handwritten notes and performed an iterative analysis going back and forth between preliminary codes and extant role and identity literature (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The second stage began when all interviews had been transcribed. Both authors coded all 455 pages of the transcribed interviews individually using a software program (QDAMiner). We met regularly to discuss the emerging categories and to agree upon their final terms and attributes. We developed first order categories that were grouped into higher order categories/themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which resulted in the four final role crafting strategies (present, adapt, challenge and explore).

In the final stage we performed cross case analysis across groups (context, hierarchical level, and gender) and individuals on our agreed categories using a software program (QDAMiner). During this stage we discovered a group of seven managers that stood out from the rest. These managers experienced more tension than the others and shared a category we named *identity-role misfit*. We wrote up short vignettes on these seven individuals inspired by narrative analysis (Maitlis, 2009; Riessmann, 2008) to get a firmer grasp of how their stories were similar to and different from each other. By comparing these vignettes with our previous analysis we advanced our theorizing by revealing the complexity involved during role crafting.

Findings

We found four main types of behavior or strategies that represent different ways that the managers addressed the leader role expectations of their subordinates: *present* (inform and demonstrate), *adapt* (comply and moderate behavior), *challenge* (persuade and oppose) and *explore* (experiment with old and new forms of role enactment). It appeared that leader identities played a crucial part in all four strategies, albeit in different ways. Sometimes leader identities played an active role at the forefront and helped steer the managers toward tasks, attitudes and behaviors they wanted the leader role to entail (when employing present and challenge strategies). At other times their leader identities lingered more in the background and helped the managers maintain certain tasks, attitudes and behaviors as part of their leader role while adjusting to role expectations (when employing adapt and explore strategies).

Based upon the different functions revealed, we propose three metaphors and suggest that leader identities act as a *guide*, an *anchor* and a *bouncing wall* during role crafting. We investigate how the managers' leader identities impact their role crafting strategies in the form of evolving leader self-stories containing descriptions of their typical leadership behaviors, leadership attributes and leadership values.

We will now describe the role crafting strategies in detail and show how the managers' leader identities facilitate and impede role crafting. In the illustrative quotes the managers are given a number 1–28 and an acronym depending upon the context to which they belong, PS: public service, BF: bank/finance, TS: technology services and M: military. Figure 1 provides an overview of the data structure relating to the four sets of role crafting strategies.

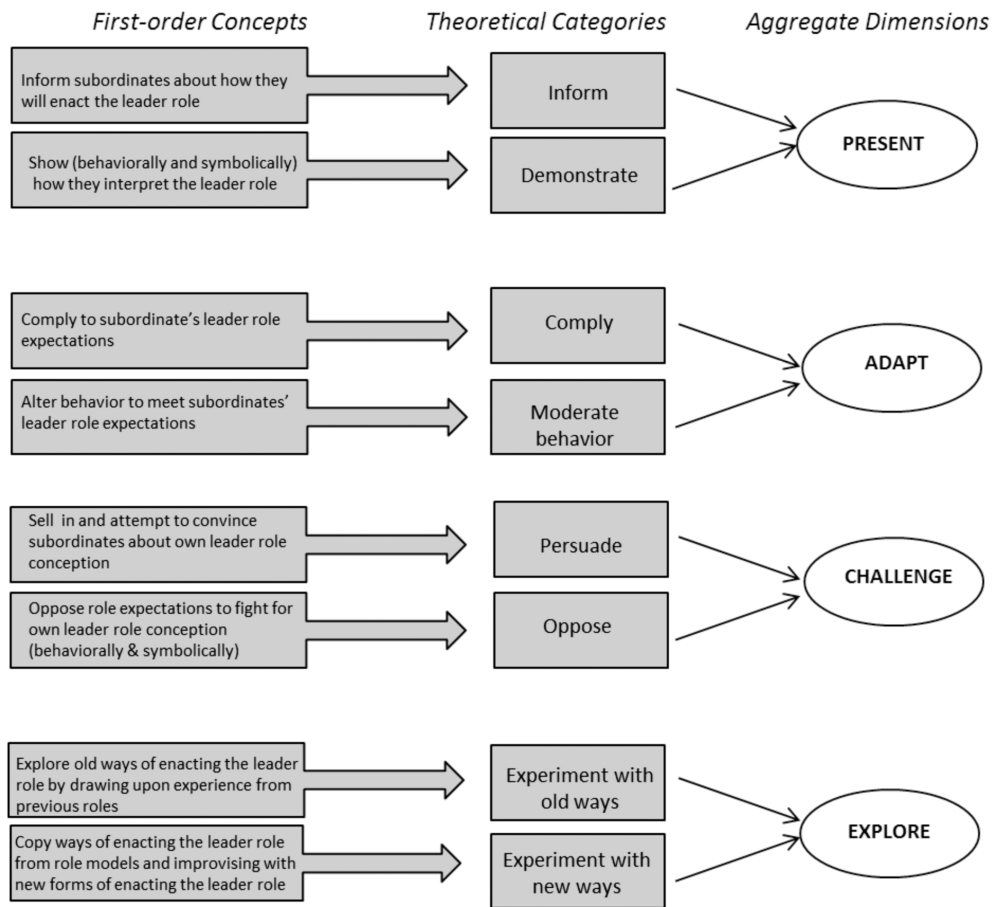


Figure 1: Overview of data structure on role crafting strategies

Strategy 1: Present role: inform and demonstrate

The *present role* strategy consisted of two sub-strategies: inform and demonstrate.

Inform: The majority of the managers reported that early in their role transition they informed their subordinates through formal and informal meetings, workshops and/or plenary sessions about what to expect of their way of enacting the leader role. The main topic of these information sessions was their leadership style and what many referred to as their leadership philosophy or leadership principles, which were personal beliefs about how best to lead (e.g.,

“I think leadership is a bit like raising children. I believe in responsibility and autonomy and will always give my subordinates a lot of leeway.” TS28). However, the managers also informed the subordinates about specific leadership tasks and duties that they planned to pay particular attention to (e.g., regular coaching sessions, weekly motivation meetings, visiting all branches of the company). The managers were aware that sometimes what they presented did not coincide with their subordinates’ expectations of the leader role:

I realized that my subordinates missed real leadership and that they needed their manager to provide answers. I had to tell them: “You will have to find the answers yourself. I will be there, support you and maybe even pose a few good questions, but you will have to choose the road ahead yourself.” (BF16)

Demonstrate: Demonstrate was another way that the managers presented the leader role. This strategy entailed showing how they planned to enact the leader role in order to prepare the subordinates for what was to come. Several managers described how they would deliberately delegate, challenge and ask questions rather than provide answers in order to convey that their way of enacting the leader role would involve coaching rather than instruction. One manager described how he invited more people to team-meetings than his predecessor had done to show his involving leadership style (BF20). Another manager explained how he had contemplated whether or not to present his new team with failing economic results in their first meeting, since his predecessor had always been so careful, but decided to take a direct approach to make it clear right away that he was “a very different kind of leader” (BF26). A senior manager (PS11) decided to sit in on client calls with subordinates many hierarchical levels below her and give feedback on their service, to convey the level of involvement they could expect of her.

Examples of more symbolic gestures aimed at presenting the leader role involved one CEO sending a personal email directly to all employees informing them about her plans and hopes for the future to demonstrate an open and including leadership style (BF4). A bank

director spiced up his budget meetings with stories about his wisdom tooth, the origins of money and the old tulip crisis in the Netherlands in order to “color the leader role in his own colors” (BF7). Yet another manager (TS28) transferred the task of writing up minutes of annual appraisals to subordinates even though there was a general expectation that this was part of the leader role. This gesture was not so much about the task itself as the message she wanted to convey about her way of enacting the leader role.

Although presentation was an active strategy it was not always planned. A senior manager had been advised by her peers and superior to keep a distance from her subordinates as she took on an even more senior position. But seeing herself as a caring person she did not like this distance. She was pondering how to maintain the caring part of herself while meeting role standards when an opportunity presented itself:

And then one day before Easter, a woman two levels down in the hierarchy came to me to ask me if she could make chocolate Easter eggs for the whole department and that I could sign them since they knew I care about people. I thought that was a brilliant idea. But then I thought someone might think I’m a bit strange if I give out all this candy. As if I’m trying to suck up to them as their new leader. But the idea was hers, so I let her get all the credit, and I signed the eggs, since you know free sweets from the boss are not just sweets, they’re more symbolic. (PS2)

When using the two present strategies the managers’ leader identities and leader role conception remained unchanged. During this strategy the managers’ leader identity played an active role and served as a *guide* that helped steer the managers toward acts of behavior, attitudes and task priorities that represented a leader role they would be both able and willing to fulfill:

In order to enact this leader role I think you need to believe it is possible and see that you can fill it with who you are and in your way ... I have a very clear idea about who I am and what I do. If I am to make it in this role, I have to be me and do it my way. (BF15)

By using their leader identity as a guide the managers seemed to attempt to limit a potential gap between who they perceived themselves to be and how they would behave as a leader:

There cannot be a gap between who you are and how you act. I feel sorry for the people who experience such a gap, because the problem is that people can smell if it isn't genuine. They may not know what it is, but they will start to feel that something is wrong. And that's awful for the person trying, who just wants to do his best. And when the gap widens it is just very uncomfortable. So I mean you have to enact the role as closely to who you are as possible. And so I believe from day one you need to use your own leadership principles in this role. (PS2)

When the managers presented their interpretation of the leader role to their subordinates, they seemed to be helped by a clear role conception, self-awareness and a well-defined idea of who they were as leaders. However, as will be shown in the following paragraphs, not all parts of their leader identities were equally well defined and hence they were not always useful as a guide to role behavior.

Strategy 2: Adapt: comply and moderate behavior

The second set of role crafting strategies was less concerned with influencing the role expectations of the subordinates and more concerned with trying to meet them. The managers tried to *adapt* to role expectations with the use of two sub-strategies: comply and moderate behavior. As the managers learned what was expected of them either by asking explicitly or paying attention to what the subordinates seemed to value, they would in some cases simply *comply* and attend to the expected leadership tasks, duties and responsibilities:

I spent a lot of time trying to understand my function and what they expected from me. One of my subordinates was very clear about his expectations regarding my presence in the everyday business of our organization so that I would understand what they do. Another one was very explicit about how he wanted me to let him do things his way and not micro-manage him. (M5)

In other cases adaptation implied constantly *moderating* one's behavior to adapt to the varying needs of the subordinates. When this second sub-strategy was mentioned, it was often related to the motivation of the subordinates. The managers described how each individual had different needs and that they would go far in their attempts to adapt if this could improve their motivation:

I realized that my subordinates are very different from what I am used to, and people are individually very different. Some are analytical, some are sales people, and they are motivated by different things, so I try to accommodate these needs, give people more support than I am used to, step down to "their level." (BF19)

The moderate strategy also concerned the manager's function as a role model in their organization. The managers tried to adapt to role model standards by abiding by the organization's values and leadership principles and by being aware of how they walked and talked (e.g., do not stand with your hands in your pocket, respect safety rules and hold on to the rail while climbing stairs, keep your temper, slow down your pace, be hands-on not hands-in etc.):

I have to be professional and relate to everyone, and so if I show off too much of my personal identity and what I believe in, I may offend people, and so as a leader you need to find the right balance. (M5)

The managers described how they worked hard at developing skills, moderating behavior and acting like role models to meet leader role expectations, all the while trying to keep their integrity intact:

It's easy to adapt the way I talk if I notice I will communicate better, and it's easy to change as long as I see why. It's like I tell my eldest daughter, there are certain compromises you just have to make. But if I feel I change due to lack of courage or integrity that would be hard. (BF23)

As the managers made use of these two forms of adaptation their main focus was on trying to meet leader role expectations. Unlike the active part leader identity played at the

forefront during the present strategy, it was now operating in the background to ensure that the managers kept core elements of their sense of self in place and to hinder any damage to their integrity and authenticity. Due to the way the managers adapted to role expectations while trying to keep a core self intact, we found *anchor* to be a suitable metaphor to describe its function: The managers anchored themselves down to a set of leadership behaviors, priorities, attributes and values (i.e., leader identity) to prevent themselves from drifting too far off in their attempts to accommodate their subordinates' needs. At the same time this anchor provided them with the flexibility required to adapt to the subordinates' role expectations:

I've made adaptations to how I behave during my meetings. I try to read the group and will sometimes speed up, tell stories, or be more serious than I like to create the right atmosphere. But I will always keep the core of me in everything I do. (BF7)

However, an anchor that is tied too closely to the ground may hinder movement:

I don't think that the leader role is a role that you can play. Right? I mean in the way that an actor can play a role, like taking on a costume, a face, and fill a role that is outside of you. Therefore it is my belief that when it comes to leadership, you have to be yourself fully ... I mean that first and foremost you have to be yourself. You need to get information and look at the challenges, and make up your *own* idea about what to do, and then be *yourself* with the strengths and weaknesses that you have. (M8)

Being closely tied to one's leader identity seemed to stop some of the managers from engaging in this particular role crafting strategy. However, it seemed to be more common among the managers to attempt to adapt, but at the same time experience the adaptation process as a struggle since their leader identities would simultaneously pull them back. It appeared to the researchers that the managers were rather ambiguous about what aspects of their leader identities were directly involved in this strategy compared to when they were engaging in the first (present) strategy. When employing this strategy they did not so much describe themselves by referring to typical behaviors such as "I'm a considerate leader" or

attributes such as “I have great motivation skills”, but were more vague and talked of how they needed to “be themselves”. Being themselves was obviously related to some struggle, so while their leader identity was used a helpful anchor in their adaptation process, the adaptation process also seemed to pull on the anchor.

Strategy 3: Challenge: persuade and oppose

The *challenge strategy* involved aiming to persuade subordinates about the appropriateness of certain elements of their leader role conception and intentionally oppose role expectations that conflicted with these in order to change them.

Persuade: The managers discussed leader (and subordinate) role behavior, tasks and duties with their subordinates and actively tried to “sell in” their way of enacting the leader role. This strategy was often used when the managers wanted to change the behaviors or norms of the subordinates, but could not use the present strategy, either because the subordinates would ignore what was informed or demonstrated, or because the strategy would risk creating resistance and lack of trust from the subordinates:

This means that I need to work in a different way. I may perhaps need to behave differently, and not just behave, but I need to involve them, explain and anchor my ideas with them, put things into a different light, as I understand they are driven by different goals. It was easier before with my former subordinates, since there everyone knew that we have to do it this way, and we could just do it. But here I need to make it clear why, and refer to what our marketing studies show, and costs etc. to explain to them where we are heading and what needs to be done. (PS17)

The managers tried different ways to persuade the subordinates about their leader role conception and some were quite creative: For example, one manager (BF16) invited a professor to talk about followership at a team gathering to get the subordinates to see that leadership is a co-created process that involves leader *and* subordinates.

Oppose role expectations implied insisting on enacting the leader role in line with own role conception and identity, despite explicit and implicit feedback from the subordinates that they wanted the manager to change approach:

I need to handle her in a good way, because she is of great value to us, she is a great advisor and we want her to continue. And so I need to be on the same page as her and find the right balance between being steadfast, firm and keeping my decisions on how to lead our group, at the same time as I listen to her ideas. So I need to dare confront her in areas that I believe is right. (BF21)

This seemed to be a strategy that the managers had to use early in their role transition, as one manager (BF16) remarked that unless you challenge role norms right away you either lose the right to challenge (as you will have given them a silent acceptance) or grow blind and become part of the system. Informal settings such as conversations over lunch regarding hobbies, was also used as an arena to oppose role expectations:

If you had asked me about my hobbies when I was a 23-year-old leader, you could be pretty sure I would be talking about the great outdoors, climbing, and diving. And I did do those things, but I didn't exactly mention that I also knitted and loved baking and shopping with friends. But now I am a bit the other way around. I tone down those macho things. I still love sports, speed, and excitement, but I tone it down a bit. I find it a bit pathetic that we should live up to what people expect from a military officer. (M5)

When attempting to challenge the leader role with the use of persuade and oppose strategies, the managers were very aware of own leader identity and role conception and how these contradicted the leader role expectations of some of their subordinates. Thus both leader identity and role were at the forefront of the role crafting process. Furthermore the managers' leader identities played two complementary functions simultaneously when employing this strategy, i.e., they alternated between operating as a *guide* that pointed the manager in the right direction for role enactment as well as an *anchor* that kept role enactment close to their leader identity.

It seemed that the managers were more prone to challenge role expectations if these conflicted with core aspects of their leader identities such as core values. Thus, similar to the way identity was employed during the use of the present strategy, this strategy involved aspects of the identity that were well-defined and explicit:

I just decided that these are my values, and I will not compromise them. I am very aware about what I take to the barricades. I mean you have to pick your fights. But you also need to know when you have reached the limit of what you can accept because of what you believe in. (BF4)

Strategy 4: Explore: experiment with old and new ways

The fourth and final set of role crafting strategies we labeled *explore*. This strategy entailed experimenting with old and new ways of leader role enactment:

I guess I experiment since I have to figure out a way to manage this new role and certain changes are needed. I know I have some strengths and I have had to think about how to behave to meet the demands of this new situation. I guess I could have been more conscious about this process. I don't normally think a lot about what we are talking about now, so this experimenting it just happens without me being very conscious about it. (PS17)

The experimentation strategy involved a trial and error dynamic (Denis et al., 2000), meaning that the managers experimented with behaviors derived from their own previous roles as well as external role models, constituting two sub-strategies. The first sub-strategy involved *experimenting with old* ways of enacting the leader role: behaving in an old and well-rehearsed style and paying attention to tasks and duties in the same way that they had previously done. The managers drew upon a vast variety of leadership experience from previous roles, childhood, hobbies, and parenthood and used these to experiment with. The managers carefully tested the reactions of others and remained open to feedback. The purpose of this strategy seemed to be to determine what elements of role enactment from their past would be appropriate in their new position:

I test the boundaries, since I know how I may appear to people. I notice when we get a good dialog going, and then I open up a little more and use my humor. I guess I test quite a bit. How far can I go? I'm at times surprised by how frank I can be and still get away with it (laughter). But I have to feel that people want to work with me and so I take leaps out of the box and I'm prepared to explore that journey. If I notice no one is reacting I guess I can continue that way and it makes me really happy. (PS 23)

Experiment with new ways was the second sub-strategy. It implied copying role models (their leadership priorities, ways of behaving, thinking, and expressing feelings, and performing leadership tasks and duties) and improvising with completely new ways of enacting the leader role. Copying from role models helped the managers benefit from the “smart stuff of successful leaders” (BF 20), “learn from failed leaders’ mistakes” (BF12), and not having to “reinvent the wheel” (ITS24). But more importantly looking to others prevented them from becoming “paralyzed by fear of making mistakes” (BF16) and gave them permission to enact the leader role in ways that they may not have dared to do on their own:

Taking after role models gives you a frame to act within, so you know how to behave. Then you won't need to be afraid. Even though we are leading bankers, who supposedly are very traditional and careful, we can now say “come on let's kick ass!” And promise our customers we'll fight for them. You didn't say that some time back, right? If we'd had a more traditional bank director as CEO who was more of a “credit person,” we'd have to be more careful. (BF18)

The managers made adjustments to what they copied in order to create a better ‘fit’ and discovered new ways of engaging in leadership resulting in the emergence of new leader roles:

I have learned from all my previous leaders. I've taken with me what they were really good at and I've thought that wasn't so good, I'll have to watch out for that. And then I'll bring in my own ideas and ask those around me how can I do this better? If you copy you will most probably feel a bit uncomfortable and then you'll need to adjust what you do, so that it becomes your own way of leading. (BF18)

This way of copying from role models was similar to imitation strategies described by Ibarra (1999), in a study of how junior professionals adapted to more senior roles. It was

interesting to note that the way of adjusting to a new role by imitation seems to continue even as managers become more experienced.

The managers seemed to enjoy this role crafting strategy and often laughed and smiled while describing the exciting feeling of not fully knowing what form of leader role and leader identity would emanate from their explorative strategy:

I feel I'm on this journey, and that I constantly fill up with new things. You have to change, because the leader role is a moving target, and you develop, you learn and you get a few bumps down the road, which makes you learn even faster. And so you shape yourself. (PS2)

While engaging in old and new forms of enacting the leader role, the managers' leader identities and role conception operated in the background of the role crafting process. By leaving both the leader identity and leader role open for change, the managers were able to remain curious about the leader role that emerged rather than insisting on one 'correct' role. Furthermore, feedback from people in their immediate organizational environment was actively used when deciding what behavior to reject and what to include in their role.

During the trial and error processes, their leader identities provided the managers with a mental framework off which they could bounce new ways of enacting the leader role in order to test how well they fitted. Due to the playful nature of the way the managers checked their role enactment against their leader identities, we came up with the metaphor of a 'bouncing wall' to describe its function during this strategy:

I try out different things and I know it's me when it just clicks. (BF12)

A manager, who had a leader identity as a comic leader, described how she experimented with humor during meetings, breaks and a blog (that did not receive the hoped for response and so was stopped) to figure out a way of enacting the leader role that would fit both the subordinates and her perception of herself:

I would of course want to be very popular with everyone (laughter) and have the employees think it's so cool to have me as a boss. And I haven't really figured out how to do this yet. But I can be funny so I go to all these meetings and I try out funny stuff. And anyone who tries to be funny will notice once in a while that you fall flat on your tummy. But you can't give up, you just have to adjust and try again. (BF6)

The way identity functioned as a bouncing wall implied that identity was both flexible and malleable and so 'bouncy' on the outside, yet hard toward its core. Thus while some parts were open for change, there appeared to be a core that remained constant and which represented a limit to change. This constant core coincides with Ashforth's description of a *global identity* as the initial basis for role identities (Ashforth, 2001, p. 38). During the exploration strategy this core seemed to be accentuated and was made more explicit by the managers who wanted to remain 'true' to it.

Perceptions of misfit

The four described strategies were used more or less by all of the managers, and they alternated between them depending on the situation at hand. During the interviews it became clear that person-to-role fit was at the forefront of what they wanted to achieve by using these strategies. However, some of the managers (seven) apparently struggled and seemed to experience a sense of *misfit* with parts of their new leader role. These examples of misfit are interesting as they indicate the complexity involved during the managers' adaptation to a new leader role.

One type of misfit was experienced by five of the managers (BF1, TS28, M8, BF20 and BF22) as the difficulty of "being oneself" in the new position. Two of the managers (BF1 and TS28) expressed that they could not enact the leader role in line with a role image (Vough et al., 2013) that did not suit them. However, the role image they described was not the result of information gathering from their subordinates, but a general one (to be an almighty leader high above the rest). They did not use any of the abovementioned role crafting strategies to

address what may have been an actual role expectation or only an imagined one. Rather, they chose to ignore these expectations.

The third manager expressing a sense of misfit (M8) refused to attend to “what others think I should do” and said that it was difficult because many would criticize his decisions. This manager rejected a definition of the “role”, insisting he would just be himself and do what he thought was right. However, it was apparent that lack of agreement between own leader role conception and the role expectations of his subordinates was a concern. The two final managers in this group (BF20 and BF22) explained how they had not fully embraced the leader identity and described work identities that were more “expert oriented” than leader oriented. These two managers did not seem to be ready to let go of their previous “hands-on” expert identities in order to take on a more “hands-off” leader identity. As a consequence they were declining to go into any of the role crafting strategies.

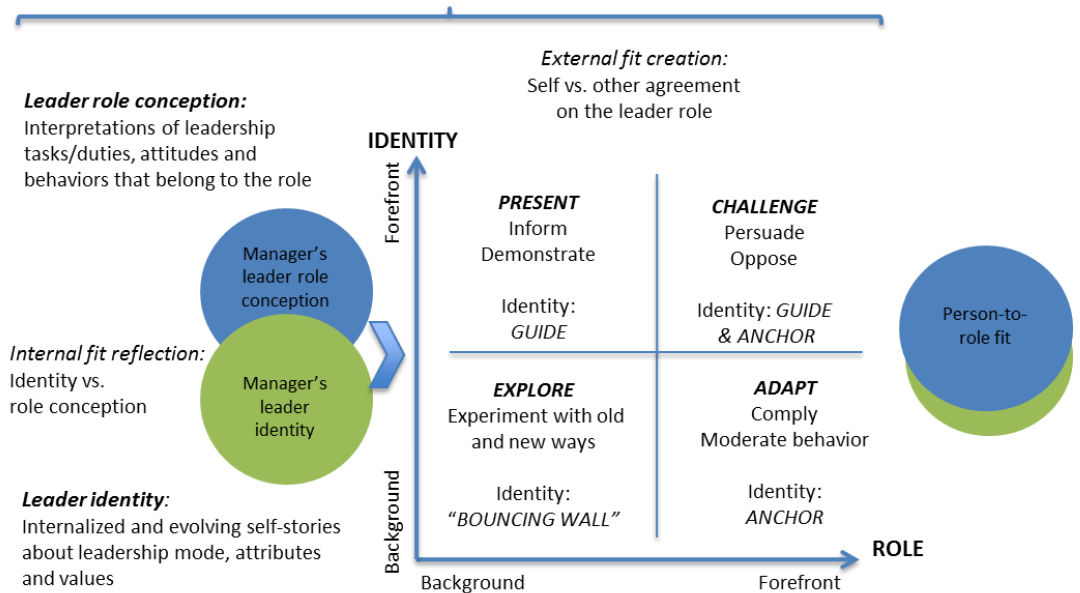
The way these five managers either chose to ignore role expectations as the first two managers did, refused to enact a role altogether as was the case with the third manager, and refrained from addressing the leader role expectations of their subordinates as did the final two, all address difficulties in relating actively to expectations. However, it appeared that for these five managers, perceptions of role expectations were not tested against reality and thus seemed to act as an excuse to avoid addressing the role expectations more explicitly.

The second type of misfit was described as an explicit incompatibility between some of the subordinates’ expectations and the manager’s own leader role conception. None of the four strategies seemed to help solve this misfit, since the subordinates had sufficient power to resist the role crafting attempts by the manager (TS14 and BF21). One manager had a strong, powerful and professional subordinate who openly resisted the manager’s decisions. The other manager worked in a politicized organization with power struggles that made these strategies difficult. Thus, power and politics will affect the degree to which a manager can

craft the role based on own role conception and identity, and additional strategies, such as seeking support from superiors, may be necessary.

Toward a model of leader role crafting

Judging from our empirical findings and theorizing, crafting the leader role is a complex process where leader identity, role conceptions and expectations act simultaneously and no single strategy is sufficient to create person-to-role fit. Figure 2 depicts this complex process and shows how leader identity and leader role expectations will be more or less dominant during the different role crafting strategies.



The bracketed part of this model corresponds to the empirical study reported in this paper, while the categories outside the bracket represents suggested future research

Figure 2: Role Crafting

We found that the managers tended to use all four strategies depending upon the issue at hand. *Present* and *challenge* strategies were most often used for crafting the part of the leader role that involved general leadership tasks and responsibilities. *Adapt* was more often related to the subordinates' needs and motivation, while *explore* was concerned with all aspects of the leader role (leadership behavior, tasks and duties).

Leader identity played an important part in all four strategies and alternated between operating as a guide, an anchor and a bouncing wall. Thus, identity was a major source of information for the managers' role conception and their role crafting process. This coincides with how the manager in Sveningsson and Alvesson's study (2003) was found to use her professional leader identity as well as personal aspects of her self-identity as a source for role enactment (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Furthermore, identity was clearly multi-faceted and complex. While some aspects were flexible others were regarded as core and were not subject to change. This complexity and flexibility provided a broad range of opportunities and pathways for the managers to obtain a fit between themselves and their role.

The examples of misfit indicate that if managers are too closely tied to their current leader identity, they may be hindered in their attempts to adapt and explore. At the same time if their leader identities are left too far behind when addressing the leader role, the managers may experience a sense of integrity loss and be perceived as inauthentic. Consequently leader identities may both facilitate and hinder their adaptation process.

Discussion

This study explores the process of crafting a leader role that is congruent with one's leader identity. The analysis reveals four strategies employed by managers in role transition to address subordinates' expectations and create a person-to-role fit. The results show that during this process both role and identity are subject to change. In the *present* strategy the managers do not attend to the subordinates' expectations directly, but rather enact the role

based on their own role conception and identity. The role may change if the manager has a different role conception compared to their predecessor, but their leader identity remains unaltered and serves as an anchor. In the second, *adapt*, strategy the managers comply with subordinates' expectations and moderate their own behavior. This adaptation may cause some aspects of the identity to change while the role stays the same. In the third strategy, *challenge*, the managers' identity and leader role conception stay the same and form a strong basis for non-compliance with role expectations. Finally, the fourth, *explore*, strategy shows that both role and identity may be malleable and develop in interaction between the leader and their subordinates.

These results suggest that a leader role may have some predefined aspects that are included in a manager's leader role conceptions and remain the same, while other aspects are subject to continuous development through communication and feedback between managers and subordinates. Consequently our findings are consistent with *both* the structuralist and the interactionist perspective on role. This suggests that a "middle range position" (Ashforth, 2001, p.4) on the leader role may represent a valuable perspective for future research wishing to explore the leader role further.

Research has shown that managers cannot perform their role successfully when there are large expectation discrepancies (Tsui et al., 1995). Furthermore, when there is incongruence between perceived role requirements and own identity, tension may arise and the individual may fail to adapt successfully to a new role (Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The present study provides possible avenues for dealing with these discrepancies.

We propose a model that explains how managers deal with these dilemmas by pursuing different adaptation strategies simultaneously. Our findings show that managers not only attend to expectation discrepancies between different stakeholders in the organization

(Denis et al., 2000; Fondas & Stewart, 1994; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), but also to the discrepancies that exist between own expectations (role conception) and the expectations of one's subordinates. Attempting to solve this latter form of discrepancy is at the core of the role crafting process. The results also offer empirical examples of the variation, or "situated differentiation", in how people construct a sense of self in role (Ibarra, 1999, p. 783). The empirical findings and theorizing of this study contribute to both role and identity theory by showing how role and identity may develop in tandem.

Consistent with work-role transition theory, managers attempt to create a person-to-role fit when entering a new job (Ashforth & Saks, 1995). However, while this theory predicts that role development and personal development are independent processes driven by separate determinants (Nicholson, 1984), our results indicate that the role transition process is better modeled as different modes of interaction between the person and the context. While work-role transition theory mainly addresses the *magnitude* of changes of role vs. person (Ashforth & Saks, 1995) our study complements this theory by providing a model that describes the process through which the development occurs. Ashforth and Saks (1995) claimed that "work adjustment" was a too mechanistic term for how individuals attempt to adjust to a new role since both self and role change. They suggested a new term "person/role evolution" which implied a "simultaneous metamorphosis of self and role" (Ashforth & Saks, 1995, p. 173) and urged future research to explore this process further. Our theorizing addresses their request and describes how such a simultaneous metamorphosis may take place through a model depicting the four strategies involved and the three different functions leader identities hold within these strategies.

Previous research on identity in organizational studies has found that individuals who try to "hold on to" one's "true self" may experience both tension and failed role adjustment (Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Seven of the managers in our sample

experienced some aspects of misfit in their role, and the descriptions of their struggles were similar to those described in these studies. However, these previous studies only addressed changes in identity while role was assumed to remain constant, while the results of our study suggest that a successful person-to-role fit necessitates changes in the role as well as the identity.

While a manager must attend to expectations from both superiors, peers and subordinates when enacting the managerial role (Denis et al., 2000; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), the leader role, defined as a “sub-role” of the managerial job (Mintzberg, 1973) has the subordinates’ expectations at the core. Thus our results support the notion of expectations enactment described by Fondas and Stewart (Fondas & Stewart, 1994). However, we found that expectations may be addressed with a far broader set of behavioral strategies than described in their study. Furthermore, the present study describes how identity plays a crucial part in the role crafting process. So while previous research has suggested that a work role may represent a major input to a manager’s identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), our findings indicate that various aspects of the managers’ leader identities represent different forms of input to the evolving leader role.

Several scholars address the leader role implicitly as a context or a perspective in their studies, but few investigate the contents and functions of a leader role explicitly. The present study represents a promising theoretical contribution to further research on the leader role. Based on our findings, we suggest that crafting the leader role is a major task for a manager in a new job, and that obtaining a person-to-role fit is part of mastering the role. To master a working role involves developing the capacity to influence the environment by *changing role expectations* to make them better fit oneself (Ashforth, 2001), thus, for a manager to master the leader role may imply addressing leader role expectations in such a way that they allow for person-to-role fit.

The role crafting process described in this study is a useful concept for capturing the two-sided nature of the leader role – the structural and the interactional – and may be further elaborated in future research. While we focused on the managers’ perspectives and interpretations of their role, future research could also investigate the relationship between “objective” role expectations and perceived expectations. For example, role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966) has focused on received vs. sent role, but our results indicate that the managers’ perceptions of their subordinates’ role expectations may be different from their actual expectations. Thus, rather than merely define the leader role as a set of leadership expectations, an important question when addressing the leader role is who holds leader role expectations and who is the person interpreting these expectations.

Our study shows that the leader role is a concept that is actively addressed by managers in practice, as managers put a lot of resources into interpreting, adapting, and negotiating expectations from their subordinates. Our results also indicate that managers aim to obtain congruence between own role conception and subordinates’ expectations as an important condition for leading successfully. Since role mastery may be one indicator of successful leadership, understanding the leader role concept may contribute to an increased understanding of the antecedents to leadership performance.

The theorizing of this study also has implications for practice. Making sure managers know about role crafting before moving into new roles may be particularly important, as transition periods represent both an opportunity and a challenge (Levin, 2010). Providing managers with a broad array of tools, in this case strategies for expectations enactment, could help managers design individual avenues for mastering their leader role. Being aware of these strategies may perhaps give the managers a needed sense of control that would enable them to address role expectations rather than ignore them. Thus formal leadership development programs may teach managers about the different role crafting strategies and how leader

identities influence their process, and leadership coaches may incorporate elements from our study into their coaching methodologies.

Limitations

The purpose of this study is to generate theory and so data was collected through purposeful, theoretical sampling. Caution is needed when generalizing from a sample that is non-randomly selected. Although our findings suggest that the four sets of role crafting strategies are used across four different organizational contexts, future studies with a larger and random sample are needed to test the validity of our claims. Furthermore, the participants of this study were experienced managers and so our findings may not necessarily generalize to individuals who are newcomers to the leader role. Pratt and colleagues (2006) suggested that as people gain experience in their role, their focus might shift from identity construction to role construction. Future studies could test if newcomers and experienced managers with leadership responsibility make use of different role crafting strategies, and how successful they are at creating a person-to-role fit.

Unfortunately there were only two participants from the military and neither of them was in early role transition. Thus the quality of data from these two participants was dependent upon their ability to recall their early transition phase. Comparing the interview data from these participants to that of the rest their rich descriptions and similar examples of role crafting indicate that they were able to do so. Since the purpose of our study was not to generalize across contexts but to make use of polar types to generate theory, having only two participants from the military should not be too grave a limitation. Nevertheless, studies wishing to advance our theory on role crafting may wish to address differences across organizational contexts more explicitly.

Conclusion

Managers who enter new roles need to meet role expectations in order to be regarded as effective and at the same time they need to keep their integrity intact if they are to establish real relationships and remain healthy. Understanding how individuals attempt to create such a fit between role expectations and self (as leader) may be beneficial for the individuals involved and their organization. This study contributes to our understanding of how individuals attempt to create a fit between their evolving leader role and leader identities by engaging in a process we refer to as *role crafting*. Our empirical findings and theorizing reveals the complexity of this process and suggests that leader roles develop through an interactive process involving the managers' leader identities, leader role conception and the role expectations of their subordinates.

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your new job.
2. We are now going to reflect upon the term, “leader role.” How do you understand this term?
3. In what way is this leader role different from your previous one?
4. How are you experiencing the transition from your previous leader role to this one?
5. What reactions (if any) are you experiencing in relation to this role change regarding your identity, values, and behavior?
6. What does it mean to “master this new leader role”?
7. What do you find challenging in this new job?
8. What do you do to meet these challenges?
9. What does it mean to be a leader in your organization?
10. Before you took this leadership job, how well did you think you would fit this leader role?
11. Now that you have started in this job, how well do you find you and the role fit each other?
12. What will be important in the future?
13. Who/what influences your leader role and you as a leader?
14. What would you stress as most important of all that we have been talking about?

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CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND

CONCLUSION

Chapter 7 Discussion, limitations and conclusion

In this final chapter I summarize the most important findings and theoretical implications of the three papers, in addition to their limitations and a conclusion of the thesis. This thesis offers empirical insights, builds and extends theory relating to three complementary approaches aimed at mastering the leader role: First, it suggests that individuals may increase efficacy beliefs and trust in subordinates through leadership coaching (paper 1). Second, it describes the content of leader identities and offers a theory describing how leader identities change as individuals align themselves with events that happen in the role (paper 2). And third, it gives an account of how experienced managers attempt to master the leader role by addressing role expectations to make the leader role better fit themselves (paper 3). I will now elaborate on the empirical findings and developed theories offered in the three papers, present their theoretical implications and suggest how they contribute to practice.

Empirical findings and theoretical implications

Paper 1

Paper 1 contributes to leadership development theory in general and leadership coaching in particular and offers empirical evidence in favor of its practice. Leadership development and leadership coaching are fairly new fields suffering from shortage of systematic investigations (Avolio et al., 2010; Ely et al., 2010) and of appropriate outcome criteria needed for orderly evaluation (MacKie, 2007; Smither et al., 2003). Without theory development, testing of theory and rigorous evaluations of leadership interventions, the divide between theory and practice will continue to grow and companies risk spending huge amounts of money on development initiatives that have negligible or unintended effects. This study adds to theory and practice by proposing two valuable outcome variables: leader role efficacy (LRE) (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010) and leaders' trust in

subordinates (LTS) (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999), that help evaluate the effectiveness of leadership coaching as a leadership development tool while respecting the characteristic idiosyncratic development process of coaching.

We suggest that LRE is a critical component in leadership development due to strong indications that LRE influences leadership performance and leadership performance ratings (Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin, & Jackson, 2008; Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio, 2011; Luthans & Peterson, 2003) and since individuals need to feel a sense of mastery to thrive in this role. We find evidence supporting that LRE may be developed effectively through leadership coaching and suggest that LRE should be evaluated when assessing the effectiveness of leadership coaching.

We argue that LRE is similar to leadership efficacy/leader self-efficacy (LSE) (Anderson et al., 2008; Chemers et al., 2000; Paglis, 2010), but is a less behavior-specific construct. While LSE refers to efficacy beliefs regarding one's ability to engage in a set of predefined leadership behaviors, LRE refers to efficacy beliefs relating to the general leader role, in addition to self-awareness and agential behavior. Thus LRE is more in line with Bandura's (1997) original theory on self-efficacy than LSE. Furthermore, a generalized understanding of the leader role allows the leaders (rather than the researchers) to define the role in terms of tasks and behaviors. Consequently the LRE construct enables us to compare leaders who need to exhibit different leadership behaviors to be effective as they operate in different organizational contexts and hierarchical levels (Conger & Fishel, 2007; Day & Sin, 2011). Since LRE does not address specific leadership behaviors it is more applicable to leadership development theory and practice in general than more behavior-specific constructs.

We propose that leaders' trust in subordinates (LTS) is another vital component of leadership development that needs to be evaluated, since it influences leadership performance and may lead to high-quality relationship between leaders and subordinates (Bandura, 2000;

Hannah et al., 2008; Watson, Chemers, & Preiser, 2001). We find that the leaders in the intervention group increased their levels of LTS, and that this increase in trust was related to a decrease in the turnover intentions of the leaders' subordinates. This is an encouraging finding since previous studies have argued that a general propensity to trust is trait-based (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995) and therefore less open to change.

Consequently our empirical findings also contribute to the scarce literature on LTS. Most trust research in leadership studies has addressed subordinates' trust in their leader (STL), while research on leaders' trust in subordinates is lacking (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). We argue that STL has different content and consequences from LTS (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000; Kramer & Tyler, 1996) and so STL and LTS should be addressed independently. We suggest that LTS may help advance a relational perspective on leadership (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011) and leadership development (Day et al., 2014) and propose future research that may investigate how LTS influences instrumental and social psychological aspects of the leader-subordinate relationship.

Finally, the empirical findings of this study reveal that the coach's facilitative behavior (support, challenge, and feedback) may explain the changes in both LRE and LTS. Thus the study adds much needed formative evaluation to the coaching literature and may help improve leadership coaching as a leadership development tool.

Paper 2

Paper 2 contributes to the literature on work-role identities in general and leader identities in particular. The emerging field of leader identities is characterized by opposing assumptions (Sinclair, 2011) and contradictory descriptions, and is lacking in empirical studies exploring the content of leader identities (Muir, 2012). Furthermore, current theories on leader identities do not fully address the idiosyncratic (personal) aspects of leader identities (DeRue et al.,

2009). This is unfortunate since identities function as a powerful sense-making device (Weick, 1995) and are believed to influence leadership capacity (Lord & Hall, 2005) and leader development (Day, 2013; Day et al., 2009). Thus a more elaborate interpretation of leader identities that includes the personal, idiosyncratic dimension may be vital to advance our understanding of how people engage in leadership and develop as ‘leaders’. Paper 2 attends to these issues.

Based upon the empirical findings and theorizing of this study, paper 2 suggests that leader identities consist of stories that managers tell themselves and others to convey three forms of self-in-leader-role meanings: leadership mode (behaviors and styles), attributes (traits, abilities and skills), and values (ideals and principles). This three-component structure of leader identities complements more simple interpretations (e.g., “having a self-view as a leader”, Lord & Hall, 2005, p.594) which highlight identification with *being* a leader, but fail to address the form of self-meaning that help individuals describe *who* they are as a leader.

This suggested three-component structure could be used to explore different functions leader identities have on individuals’ capacity to engage in leadership. For example, Akrivou and Bradbury-Huang (2011) have proposed that self-concept complexity may influence one’s capacity to operate as a change catalyst. Future research may investigate if complexity of leader identities in the form of a large variety of leadership modes, attributes and values, influences one’s capacity to facilitate change.

Another interesting line of research involves exploring if the level of leader identity congruency (i.e., when one’s self-perceived leadership modes, attributes and values are in accordance with one another) influences leadership capacity. Due to the way leadership coaching was found to increase self-awareness of leaders in paper 1 (self-awareness was part of LRE), leadership coaching could perhaps also increase identity congruency through greater self-awareness. Future research investigating the effect of leadership coaching on identity

congruency may advance the theory and practice of both leadership development and leadership coaching, and could add to our understanding of ways to master the leader role.

The empirical findings of paper 2 suggest that leader identities contain a large idiosyncratic dimension involving unique compositions of leadership modes, attributes and values, and a smaller conventional dimension that contains elements relating to conventional norms of the leader role. In addition to reminding us of the importance of addressing the personal aspects of leader identities in future research, this finding indicates that role identity theory (RIT) (McCall & Simmons, 1978) may be particularly valuable to help advance our understanding of leader identities and how they develop. The way RIT addresses both the idiosyncratic *and* conventional dimension of leader identities suggests it provides a more holistic understanding of leader identities than the more commonly used theories in leadership studies such as social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and identity theory (IT) (Burke, 1980; Stets & Burke, 2000) which both fail to address the personal, idiosyncratic dimension of role identities (Hitlin, 2003).

Paper 2 also adds to the identity literature by offering a theory on leader identity change that advances Burke's (2006) theory through a more detailed account of the change mechanisms at play. The theory suggests that leader identities develop through two main mechanisms: a strengthening of leader identity content and a more fundamental change of content. Paper 2 describes how managers compare stories of their current leadership performance with stories from their past and possible future, and as a result come to reevaluate the strength (stronger/weaker) and reassemble the self-meaning content of these evolving stories by adding, replacing, losing and shedding self-meaning. The reconstruction of these stories leads to the development of new leader identities. This theory on leader identity reconstruction helps explain how managers attempt to master their leader role by bringing themselves into line with their environment through evolving leader self-stories that

give them a sense of meaning and continuity. Future research could advance this theory by investigating which episodes and critical moments provide a basis for story creation, and how feedback and support may influence the creation process.

Finally, the empirical findings and merged theoretical lenses (“storied-self” and “self-meaning”) employed in paper 2 propose a first step for integrating opposing streams of leader identity research. Taking a storied-self (McAdams, 1996) interpretation on leader identities means understanding leader identities in the form of stories individuals tell themselves and others about who they are as leaders. This interpretation allows for an integration of both the critical and the optimistic streams of leader identity research since it acknowledges the assumptions of both fields of thought and suggests that leader identities are multiple, fragmented and contradictory (critical), *and* coherent (positive). Future research may integrate these streams further and develop what may be a more realistic understanding of a complex and dynamic phenomenon.

Paper 3

Paper 3 contributes to the literature on role and identity in general and to the leader role and leader identity in particular. There is a general paucity of contemporary organizational studies that address the leader role in its own right (Hiller et al., 2006). Nevertheless, today’s managers continue to talk of their leader role and attend leadership coaching to gain a sense of mastery of this role (paper 1). Paper 3 offers a contemporary interpretation of the leader role seen through the eyes of experienced senior managers, and proposes a theory of *role crafting* which describes strategies used to address subordinates’ leader role expectations.

Based upon the data analysis and drawing upon role and identity theories we describe four sets of strategies employed to craft a fit between the leader role and leader identities as a foundation for successful role performance: present, adapt, challenge and explore. We find

that leader identities play an important part in all four strategies albeit in different ways, and suggest three metaphors: guide, anchor and a bouncing wall, to describe their varying functions. We suggest that role crafting is a complex process, involving the managers' leader role conception, their leader identities and the role expectations of their subordinates, and that due to this complexity no single strategy is sufficient to create a person-to-role fit.

Previous theories on role development have proposed models that predict role change (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 1995; Graen, 1976; Nicholson, 1984; Nicholson & West, 1988; Turner, 1962). However, apart from Fondas and Stewart's (1994) theory of expectations enactment, there is a general lack of fine-grained descriptions of the role development process in the form of actual strategies employed. Expectations enactment theory (Fondas & Stewart, 1994) explains how managers address the role expectations of their subordinates by responding to, modifying and ignoring them. Paper 3 offers a broader and more detailed description of behavioral strategies than Fondas and Stewart (1994) suggest. And unlike their theory of expectations enactment, our role-crafting theory shows how leader identities play a vital part both enabling and hindering the use of role-crafting strategies.

Identity research has found that when there is incongruence between identities and roles, individuals may experience tension and difficulties to adapt if they try to hold on to their "true" identities (Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Paper 3 offers a theoretical model that explains how managers may address these difficulties and deals with the dilemma of being true to oneself while adapting to role expectations of subordinates. How managers attend to this paradoxical dilemma may be crucial for later job success.

While work-role transition theory (Ashforth & Saks, 1995) has suggested that the role and individual will develop through two separate processes, our theory suggests that the person and the role will interact and change *simultaneously*. We suggest that to master the leader role, managers need to develop the capacity to address role expectations by changing

elements of the leader role *and* changing elements of their leader identities. Future research may explore this further by testing if the role-crafting strategies described in paper 3 do in fact lead to a sense of person-to-role fit and mastery of the leader role.

While it is not uncommon to address the leader role implicitly in organizational studies as a context or perspective, few studies investigate the content and functions of the leader role explicitly. Paper 3 contributes to the organizational literature by proposing a contemporary perspective on the leader role suggesting it consists of a set of pre-existing and emerging leadership tasks, duties, behaviors and attitudes that belong to a managerial position. This interpretation of the leader role fits better with current views on leadership as a “complex, multi-level and socially constructed process” (Gardner et al., 2010, p. 952) than older structural role theories which understand the leader role as a set of predefined tasks and duties to be sent and received (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

Furthermore, we suggest that the leader role is a more inclusive term than the leadership role. We argue that while *leadership role* refers to leadership tasks and behaviors (e.g., facilitate change), the term *leader role* also incorporates a “social role” that includes a set of normative and anticipatory expectations (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 64) in the form expected attitudes and characteristics held toward the person who occupies the managerial position to which the role is linked. The empirical findings of the study indicate that managers aim to obtain congruence between their interpretation of this leader role and subordinates’ role expectations (both the social leader role and the tasks, behaviors and duties) as an important condition for leading successfully. We suggest that such congruence is an indication of role mastery and argue that role mastery is one indicator of successful leadership. Future research on the leader role and role congruence may therefore offer insights into an antecedent of leadership performance.

Practical implications

Our findings on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool are relevant for practice. Day and colleagues (Day et al., 2009) have argued that leadership development should attend to internal processes (and not only external, behavioral processes) since a stronger internal core may influence how individuals engage in leadership situations, which again may lead to the development of leadership skills. We suggest that LRE and LTS represent important aspects of such an internal core. Since LRE also influences self-motivation and perseverance (Hannah et al., 2008) and LTS may be reciprocal in nature (Serva, Fuller, & Mayer, 2005), we argue that coaching may set off positive development spirals and accelerate leadership development. Consequently leadership coaching represents a valuable leadership development tool that may trigger a long-term development process. Furthermore, our formative evaluation indicates that facilitative coaching behavior (support, challenge and feedback) influences the increase in LRE and LTS. Thus participating in coaching is not sufficient in itself but dependent upon the skills of the coach, and so organizations should ensure that their coaches provide adequate support, challenge and feedback.

Paper 2 on leader identity contributes to practice through a suggested framework for identity-based leader development and leadership coaching. I suggest that the three-component structure of leader identities and theory on leader identity change may be used as a framework for guided reflection during leadership development programs offered to groups and during leadership coaching. A guided identity reflection may perhaps facilitate insight into unconscious leader identities and enable a deliberate reconstruction of old leader identities that no longer apply but which may still influence role enactment. Support in identity reflection may be particularly helpful for individuals in work-role transition since this is a period that tends to prompt a questioning of one's sense of self (Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra &

Petriglieri, 2010) and so should help managers settle more quickly into new roles and give them a sense of mastery of the leader role.

Paper 3 on role crafting offers insights into how experienced managers put a lot of resources and effort into reflecting on the role and crafting a leader role that fits, and shows how some struggle during this process. Our findings indicate that managers may benefit from addressing role expectations in a more conscious way and through the support of an entrusted colleague, a mentor or a coach. Furthermore, paper 3 suggests that leadership development programs may do well to add knowledge on role crafting to their curriculum. A typical approach to leadership development is to communicate what is expected and to provide resources and support through training, education and development initiatives to develop expected leadership skills (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011; Brungardt, 1997). This approach may be sufficient if the leader role is a set of predefined leadership tasks, duties and behavioral expectations. However, if the leader role is not only predefined and ready to be learned but dynamic and socially constructed as our theory suggests complementary approaches to leadership development are needed. We suggest that teaching managers about the four sets of role-crafting strategies offered in paper 3 and creating an awareness of how leader identities both facilitate and hinder role crafting, should help managers in their attempts to gain a sense of control over the complex and evolving leader role.

Limitations

The contributions of the three papers should be viewed in light of several limitations.

First, some caution must be applied regarding the interpretation of the effects of coaching on LRE and LTS in paper 1. There were considerable differences on these two variables at time one between the coaching and the control group. Although we controlled for the variances through a residual analysis and found that facilitative coaching behavior helped

explain the changes in LRE and LTS, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that at least part of the changes between time one and time two were caused by these initial differences. Furthermore, like several coaching studies before ours, the small sample size may make it difficult to produce enough statistical power (Baron, Morin, & Morin, 2011). However, the various analyses we conducted and our use of multisource data help address this challenge and so our findings should still be fairly robust.

Another potential limitation is a possible selection bias, as the participants were self-selected (to ensure the motivation necessary for participating in coaching). Our rigorous pre- and post-test with control group design and multisource measures should help address some of the statistical threats caused by selection bias.

Papers 2 and 3 both used a multiple case research design with the objective of developing theory on leader identity (paper 2) and the leader role (paper 3). A standard criticism of a case study design is that the derived findings cannot be generalized to other cases or to a population beyond the case (Bryman, 2012). However, case studies are not meant to generalize to populations or universes, but to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003). To advance the theoretical propositions offered in the form of theoretical models in the two papers, future research may test their validity with a larger and random sample and may, for example, compare experienced managers with newcomers to the leader role.

Since the objective of papers 2 and 3 was to develop theory, priority was given to the construction of theoretical concepts while more elaborate stories and descriptions were kept to a minimum and were only offered as illustrating quotes. This entails a typical challenge that qualitative studies presented in journals face, namely a trade-off between stories and constructs (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt, 1991). Nevertheless, the quotes provided in the two papers permit a glimpse into the rich stories offered in the interviews, and so despite their

modest presentation in the papers, should add some depth to our understanding of complex phenomena.

A final limitation relates to the possibility that the results conveyed in the three papers may be culturally dependant since they are based upon data collected from Norwegian managers, and so may be less relevant for other national cultures. Norway is part of the Nordic cluster that is characterized by lower power distance and higher individualism (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). And even though the importance of national context relative to other contexts (e.g., organizational and hierarchical level) has been questioned (Jepson, 2009), we cannot exclude the possibility that the effects of leadership coaching could be different in cultures with a larger power distance, that leader identities would be less idiosyncratic and more conventional in cultures that emphasize collectivism over individualism, or that slightly different role-crafting strategies may be employed in another culture. Consequently, to advance our understanding of the theories and empirical findings offered in this thesis, future research could test these across cultures with varying degrees of for example power distance and collectivism.

Conclusion

The overall objective of this thesis is to provide empirical insights and theories that advance our understanding of how individuals may increase a sense of mastery of the leader role. The thesis contributes to the fields of leadership development, leadership coaching, leader identity, leader role and role development, in several ways. First, it offers theory on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool by developing and testing two valuable outcome variables, leader role efficacy (LRE) and leaders' trust in subordinates (LTS), and finds evidence in favor of its practice (paper 1). Second, it offers empirical insights and theory on the content of leader identities and how they change, which may help managers gain a

sense of mastery by bringing themselves into line with events that happen in the role (paper 2). And finally, it presents empirical findings and offers a theory of role crafting describing strategies for addressing role expectations of subordinates to make the leader role better fit oneself (paper 3). Together the thesis extends and builds theory relating to mastering the leader role, and contributes to practice by suggesting ways to help managers deal with a complex and evolving leader role, benefiting not only the individual managers, but also their subordinates and their respective organizations.

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The objective of this thesis is to develop theories and provide empirical insights that advance our understanding of how individuals may increase a sense of mastery of the leader role. The thesis addresses three complementary approaches to mastering the leader role and deals with each approach in a separate paper contributing to the fields of leadership development, leadership coaching, leader identity, leader role and role development.

First, the thesis offers theory on leadership coaching as a leadership development tool by developing and testing two outcome variables: leader role efficacy and leaders' trust in subordinates, and presents evidence in favor of its practice (paper 1).

Second, it provides theory and empirical findings regarding the content of leader identities which may help managers gain a sense of mastery by bringing themselves into line with events that occur in the role, and suggests a theory on how leader identities change (paper 2).

And finally, it presents empirical insights and develops a theory of "role crafting" which describes a set of strategies used by experienced managers aiming to address role expectations of subordinates and align the leader role with their leader identities (paper 3).

Together the thesis extends and builds theory relating to the leader role, and contributes to practice by suggesting ways to help managers deal with a complex and evolving leader role, benefiting not only the individual managers, but also their subordinates and their respective organizations.

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