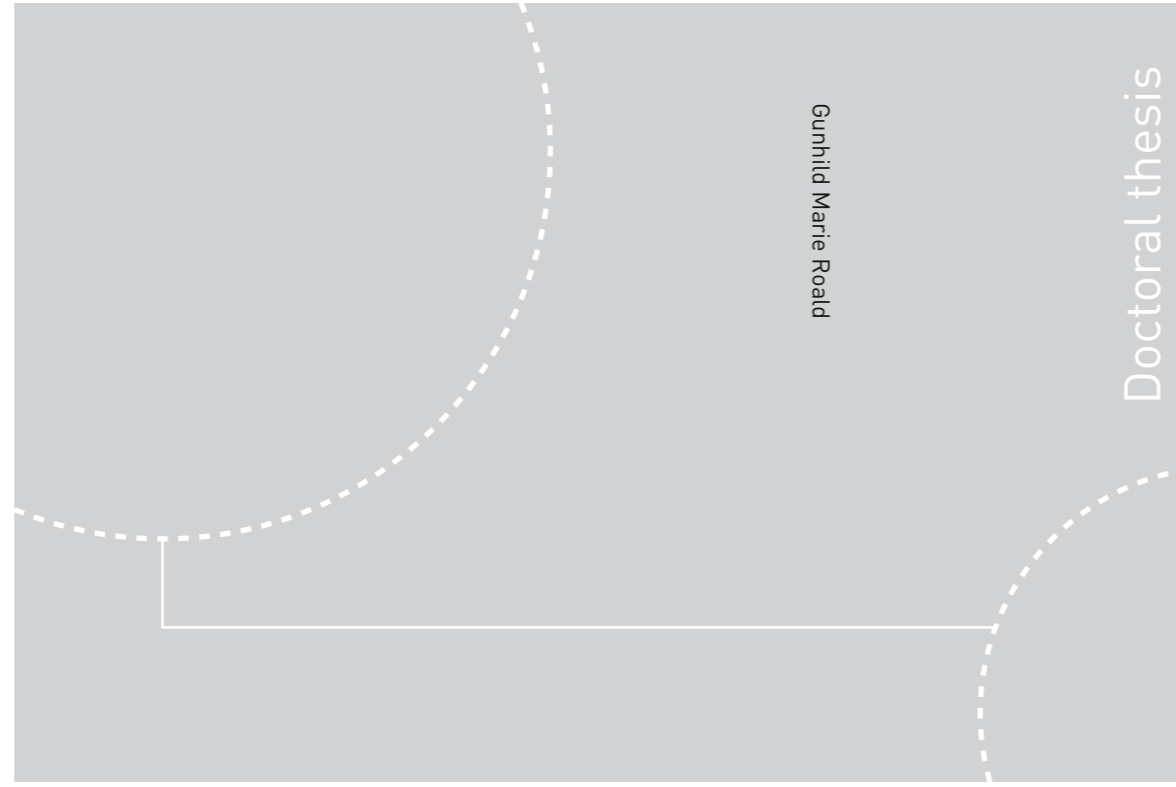


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Gunhild Marie Roald

When coaching flows into leadership

A phenomenological-hermeneutic study of leaders' lived experience of coaching leadership

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Abstract

Coaching leadership is a relatively young field of research (Hagen, 2012), where particularly the leader perspective has been scarcely investigated (Ellinger et al., 2014). The purpose of the study is to explore leaders' lived experience of coaching leadership, and to examine how coaching influences leadership from a leader perspective. The research question guiding the study is: *"How is coaching leadership experienced by leaders, and how does coaching influence leadership?"* With a phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective, ten semi-structured interviews and two focus-group interviews with leaders in different Norwegian companies who have attended the same coaching course have been carried out.

The theoretical framework of the study utilises an existential-humanistic perspective on coaching leadership. The concepts of self-actualisation, acceptance, congruence, experience, mutuality and empathy are elaborated on in the theory section, primarily drawing on the person-centred theory of Carl Rogers and the theory of persons-in-relation of John Macmurray, as transferred to the counselling field by Ragnvald Kvalsund and Eleanor Allgood.

The data analysis has been inspired by the phenomenological-hermeneutic procedure suggested by Lindseth and Nordberg (2004). Three main categories have emerged as a result of this analysis: self-confidence, integration and connectedness. Within each main category, three sub-categories are found and presented.

The findings from this study indicate that the experience of coaching leadership is one of integration in that coaching "just flows into" leadership, as expressed by one of the informants. This term is not to be understood as meaning that everything the leader experiences might be explained by the coaching concept. Rather, coaching co-exists with other interventions and approaches. The leaders search for the "coachability" of a variety of situations within their leadership, that is, aspects of a particular context that are suitable for assuming a coaching approach. Furthermore, the findings suggest that coaching leadership involves an experience of self-confidence: leaders feel better equipped to perform their leadership as a result of having learned about coaching and applied it within their leadership, or learning about coaching becomes a confirmation of their leadership experience and thus conceptualises, or legitimates their leadership as they know it. Finally, the findings indicate that the experience of coaching leadership is one of feeling more connected

to one's employees: taking a coaching approach in encounters with employees entails an experience of discovering the person behind the employee and thus interacting on a more existential, personal level.

In the discussion, the relevance of giving space to the experiential dimension of conversations and encounters within leadership is emphasised, and the question of mutuality is addressed and discussed as a not yet fully realised potential of coaching leadership.

Preface

An arduous but immensely satisfactory process has come to an end and it is time to thank all those who have contributed to making this Ph.D. come true.

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Thanks, mum and dad, for always being there. You have taught me much about making the existential choice to take charge of, endure and enjoy life in all its many facets. Dad, thanks for your relentless interest in my project and process, and for your numerous readings of drafts. Mum, thanks for teaching me a lot about relational processes by being willing to scrutinize the dynamics of our relationship.

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Gunhild Marie Roald

Trondheim

August, 2016

To my father

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1. Introduction

There seems to be an increasing interest amongst leaders to acquire competence in coaching their employees (Anderson, 2013; Hagen, 2012). In many contexts, leaders are *expected* to develop coaching as a part of their leadership (Anderson, 2013; Anderson, Rayner, & Schyns, 2009; David & Matu, 2013). While much has been written on the topic of coaching, the focus appears to a large degree to be on publications with a prescriptive and anecdotal flavour (Beattie et al., 2014; Ellinger, Beattie & Hamlin, 2014; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Although there is growing interest among scholars and researchers when it comes to the subject of coaching in general, and coaching leadership¹ in particular, research into the field of coaching leadership is still relatively scarce (Anderson et al., 2009; Hagen, 2012). This means that if we are to develop the understanding, theory and practice of coaching leadership, more research is required (Hagen, 2012).

Within coaching leadership research, the organisation and employee perspective has been explored to a larger degree than the leader perspective, indeed, few studies have focused on outcomes of coaching for the coaching leader (Gomez & Gunn, 2012; Ellinger et al., 2014). This study aims to provide new insight into this by exploring leaders' lived experience of coaching leadership, and examining how coaching influences leadership from a leader perspective.

In this thesis, coaching leadership is understood as a process in which the leader in one way or another assumes the role of coach in relation to her² employees, uses elements from the coaching field in her relations to these employees or has a coaching perspective on her leadership as a whole. When the leader takes on the role of coach, it means that she regards herself as a facilitator of the employee's reflective processes, as well as a collaborative co-creator of these processes. In this way, it is believed that one might facilitate for the growth and development for both parties in the relationship (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). However, it must be mentioned here

¹ The term "managerial coaching" seems to be most frequently used in the literature about the phenomenon being studied in this research project (Hagen, 2012). However, I have chosen to use the term coaching leadership in this thesis. I do this because the prevailing definitions of management and leadership (Kotter, 1990; Kotterman, 2006) underpin that coaching is more adequately placed under the leadership domain than in the management area. This choice will be further justified and discussed in the theory section. In cases where the term managerial coaching is applied in this thesis, it appears in relation to literature using this concept, but refers to coaching leadership. This does not imply, as indicated above, that management and leadership are considered to be interchangeable constructs (Kotterman, 2006).

² The personal pronouns "he", "she", "his" and "her" will be used interchangeably and randomly in generic descriptions of the coach, coachee, leader, employee, therapist, client, counsellor, and so on.

that when the leader assumes the role of coach, this role is not considered equivalent to the role of the “professional” (Lane, Stelter, & Stout-Rostron, 2014) coach. The coaching leader is seen in a conceptually different way than the professional coach, particularly due to her responsibilities in relation to the performance of the employee, and the formal power structure of the leader-employee relationship (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Dilemmas and challenges related to these issues will be discussed, particularly in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, using elements from the coaching field implies asking questions that invite the employee to take an active role in conversations and processes, in terms of encouraging reflection on how issues might be resolved and on her capabilities and role in resolving these issues (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). In terms of techniques and interventions, the main tool of the coaching leader is her ability to ask questions that stimulate reflection, engagement and experiential exploration (Joseph, 2014). However, this thesis discusses whether such techniques must be followed by and anchored in an existential-humanistic attitude that involves an unconditional acceptance and appreciation of the other person (Buber, 1958/2000; Rogers, 1961/2004), and acknowledgement of her capabilities and resources to resolve her challenges and create a meaningful life (Ivey, D’Andrea, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 2012; Rogers, 1961/2004). The thesis also discusses whether coaching leadership holds an untapped potential in becoming a more two-way, reciprocal process and relationship between the leader and the employee.

Finally, having a coaching perspective on one’s leadership as a whole implies regarding coaching as an overarching leadership style or form (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013), however, it does not mean that one takes a coaching role in each and every situation within one’s leadership, as will be further elaborated on in section 1.3.2. below.

Coaching leadership might be found in the form of structured, planned, one-to-one conversations, so-called “sit down sessions” (Anderson, 2013). It might also take place in more informal situations, such as: *“a chance meeting in the hallway, a telephone session or a coaching interaction that comes about unexpectedly during a casual lunch”* (Macmillan, 2011, p. 5). This variety of contexts is one of the aspects that is believed to distinguish coaching leadership from what will be referred to as “professional” coaching (Lane et al., 2014) or “specialist” coaching (Anderson,

2014).³ One of the key discussions in this thesis is about the transferability to the leadership context of concepts that have arisen from the field of counselling and psychotherapy (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; Rogers, 1961/2004, 1959) and then been transferred to the coaching field (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008).

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It begins with a presentation of the personal motivation for the study, and continues with a brief explanation of how the terms coaching and coaching leadership are understood. The background of coaching in the business context will then be outlined, followed by an introduction to the existential-humanistic perspective on coaching which constitutes the theoretical framework of this study. This will be followed by a further elaboration on the coaching leadership concept and a brief review of research in the area of coaching leadership. The chapter will close with a presentation of the significance, purpose and design of this study.

1.1. Personal motivation

In one period of my life I worked as a leader of a non-profit organisation, with 25 employees for whom I had personnel responsibility. In my experience, leadership seemed to involve an almost endless list of areas in which one was expected to demonstrate competence, knowledge and overview. Some domains were easily manageable: I felt competent, energized and powerful, and things went smoothly. In other areas, I fell short and experienced friction and difficulties. In the midst of this experienced complexity, I felt the need for someone to help me sort out ideas, thoughts, frustrations and joys, and help me figure out what to focus on: What should my identity and profile as a leader be? Which qualities could be developed as my unique strengths, what tasks could be delegated and what should be the guiding light of my daily work?

In this situation, I had a personal coach. She said little, but was a good listener. The thrill of having someone sitting by my side for an hour every once in a while – just listening and asking well-timed, open questions – was interesting. This process helped me sleep better at night. Facing “my” employees, however, I still struggled with finding the balance between being the listener and the instructor, the strict leader

³ The terms “professional” coaching and “specialist” coaching will hereafter be used interchangeably in this thesis.

and the caring counsellor, while shifting between the perspective of organisational and individual needs.

Bearing this in mind, in my Ph.D. I wanted to explore the combination of coaching and leadership in some way. While participating in a coaching course with mostly leaders as my co-participants, the objective of this study became obvious: I wanted to find out more about the combination of leadership and coaching in terms of exploring what the experience of coaching leadership might mean for leaders in their respective leadership contexts.

In the following, an initial idea of the coaching concept will be presented.

1.2. Coaching

This section includes a clarification of the use of the terms *coaching*, *coaching leadership* and *coaching approach* in this thesis. Furthermore, some perspectives on the professional field of coaching, coaching in the work context and existential-humanistic ideas in coaching are explored.

1.2.1. Clarification of terms

Although the phenomenon being studied in the present project is coaching leadership, the word coaching will appear frequently in this thesis. This does not mean, however, that coaching and coaching leadership are understood as interchangeable concepts, as mentioned above. On the contrary, it is assumed that one should distinguish between the two, an issue that is further discussed in Chapters 3 and 6. This basic distinction is, in fact the reason why the term coaching is used throughout the thesis, alongside the concept of coaching leadership. When the concept coaching is used, it refers to a professional helping⁴ relationship underpinned by explicit and implicit contracts (Alrø, 2011), unless otherwise stated. This is a helping relationship between a professional coach and a coachee⁵, where the coaching process is arranged around regular, planned and structured meetings and conversations (Alrø, 2011). Because the research field of coaching leadership is still in its infancy (Ellinger et al., 2014), it might be argued that there has not yet been enough research and theory development

⁴ The terms “help”, “helper”, “helpee”, “helping relationship”, “helping context”, “helping process” and “helping perspective” will be frequently applied throughout this thesis. This includes a wide understanding of the term “help”. According to Schein (2009), help is an integrated part of social life. It thus goes beyond the image of the powerful helping the helpless, but encompasses the most microscopic helping situation of every-day life (Schein, 2009), such as when one person holds the door for another. Coaching is considered to be one of several activities and processes within the professional helping field (Kvalsund, 2005a; 2015a).

⁵ The person being coached

for the coaching leadership concept to “paddle its own canoe”.⁶ For this reason, it is appropriate here to explain the coaching concept, and to present the theoretical grounds on which it is understood, as the basis for further theoretical exploration of coaching leadership.

However, in addition to being understood in terms of a professional helping relationship, coaching is also interpreted as a specific kind of activity that might be found in other contexts than the professional coaching field. In other words, it is assumed that coaching is not reserved for professional coaches. On the contrary, it is believed that people might be more or less *coaching* in their way of communicating with others and in their attitude towards other people, irrespective of the role they have when facing the person in question (Roald, 2015). Bearing this understanding in mind, the term “coaching approach” is frequently used in this text, referring to both an attitude and a concrete intervention that implies asking questions and being able to listen and respond in such a way that the interlocutor feels accepted and understood (Moen & Kvalsund, 2008).

In the literature, the concept *coaching approach* normally refers more generally to a specific theoretical underpinning or model guiding (professional) coaching practice (Grimley, Oven, Cawood Ehrlich, & Crisp, 2013; Iveson, George, & Ratner, 2012). Here, however, the term alludes to the use of techniques or competencies associated with coaching, in any context, and is therefore disconnected from the “professional” (Lane et al., 2014) or “specialist” (Anderson, 2013) coaching context. A coaching approach might be used consciously or unconsciously by, for instance, teachers, priests, parents, friends, coaches or leaders. In this thesis, such an understanding of coaching underpins the understanding of coaching leadership: Just as someone can be considered a *coaching* teacher, people might be seen as *coaching* leaders due to the way they use a coaching approach in a given context. In the following, the polyphony of theoretical and practical shades in the coaching field will be explored.

⁶ When words or expressions such as “paddle its own canoe” are put into brackets, but do not appear in italics, it is because they are not quotes from other authors or informants, but rather, supplemental or metaphorical concepts that are introduced. Furthermore, when generic concepts emanating from other authors are introduced, such as Heidegger’s (1927/1962) “being-in-the-world”, they do not appear in italics, and they are referred to by year of publication but not with page numbers. Quotes from informants and from the literature, on the contrary, are presented with both brackets and italics.

1.2.2. A manifold field

The field of coaching has been described as the “wild west” (Sherman & Freas, 2004). A plethora of different theoretical and practical orientations has arisen under the label “coaching” (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). The profession of coaching has therefore emerged from a broad educational field: from brief weekend courses to higher degree education within such fields as psychology, adult learning and business studies (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). This manifold situation in the coaching field leads to both practical and theoretical challenges, practical in the sense that individuals who might consider taking part in a coaching process have no standardised licencing system to rely on, as would be the case if one were to hire a lawyer or psychologist, for example. Such licences do not, of course, guarantee the quality of the help offered by the professionals in question (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003; Schein, 2009). However, from a client perspective, they might facilitate the selection process and at least guarantee a certain educational background. The complex discussion about licencing and restrictions on entering the field is outside the realm of this thesis and will therefore not be further elaborated on here.

A theoretical challenge arising from this “wild-west” situation is that it complicates the process of establishing a common ground from which coaching might be understood (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). However, the theoretical and empirical exploration of coaching is an on-going process, and an important part of the professionalisation of the field (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Lane et al., 2014). In other words, the emergence and maturation of the coaching profession is believed to depend on continuous research and theoretical development.

1.2.3. Coaching in the work context

The increase in coaching in the work context might be a response to changes in basic characteristics of the work sphere (Ellinger et al., 2014; Joo, Sushko, & McLean, 2012). In recent decades, the Western world has undergone significant development in terms of increased globalisation, migration, flow of information and refinement of technology – and as a consequence of this, there is an accelerating rate of change (Graetz, 2000; Todnem By, 2005). Organisations are compelled to undertake continuous adjustments to changing societal conditions. This places pressure on

employees at all levels, particularly on leaders, as they need to develop the ability to create change and learn (Ellinger, 1999).

According to Sherman and Freas (2004), the demand for a “*re-humanization of executives*” (p. 84) has gradually entered the leadership field in conjunction with these fundamental changes: they propose that leaders must develop the ability to engage in relationships with employees where conditions of growth, development and learning can be established. The emergence of coaching in organisations in general, and coaching leadership in particular, might be seen as a response to this emergent need. Herrera (2010) sees coaching leadership in relation to the fact that leaders are being challenged to “*do more with less, keep pace with the current information explosion and technological revolution, and display breadth and depth in more areas than their predecessors*” (p. 1). In other words, the competencies that leaders are expected to have in today’s organisations seem to have increased as a consequence of the accelerating pace of societal, and thus, organisational change. For instance, it has been suggested that coaching covers an area that has earlier been reserved for human-resources positions⁷ (Anderson, 2013; Ellinger et al., 2014, Ye et al., 2016).

During the 1980s, “executive coaching” emerged as a widespread leadership development strategy (Sherman & Freas, 2004). In this particular type of coaching, leaders engage in personal and professional developmental processes with external coaches (Bluckert, 2005; Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Joo et al., 2012; O’Neill, 2007), just like I did while working as a leader, as described in section 1.1. It has been proposed that coaching leadership has emerged in the wake of this tendency: from her own developmental processes with a coach, the leader might discover the possibility of taking a coaching approach with her employees (Knights & Poppleton, 2007; Ladyschewsky, 2010). Frish (2001) suggests that “*quietly and without fanfare*” (p. 241) external coaches have in part been replaced by internal coaches in the organisation, including the leader assuming the role of the coach for her employees.

It also seems that coaching leadership has arisen from the requirement to create more adaptive and flexible organisations (Hagen, 2012). By developing

⁷ When the word human resources (also referred to as HR) appears in this thesis, it refers in most cases to the part of an organisation that is focused on activities and aspects relating to the employees, including recruiting, training, employee benefits, and retention. In the Norwegian context, people who work in the HR domain do not necessarily have personnel responsibility for employees, that is, the formal responsibility to follow up employees and arrange for their development in the daily working situation (Schjander & Østrem, 1987). As such, an individual from the HR department might give advice and assist the leader in performing her personnel responsibility. The term human resources is also used in a more literal meaning of the word, referring to the resource that is offered by the individuals in the organisation, as distinguished from, for instance, the organisation’s economical and technological resources.

coaching skills, leaders might aim to assist the process of learning, growth and development of their employees so that they contribute to the adaptability and productivity of the organisation (Ellinger et al., 2014), and thus improve its competitive advantage (Graetz, 2000; Todnem By, 2005). It is even suggested that coaching has gradually become one of the most important functions of the leader (Mujtaba, 2007). A recent Norwegian survey study indicates that relational skills constitute one of the three competencies leaders feel that they need to develop (Rønning, 2013). As coaching is concerned with developing relational and communicational skills (Kvalsund, 2005a), the apparent growing interest in coaching leadership, as manifested in the growing field of research (Hagen, 2012), and the seemingly increasing number of education programmes and courses offered in the field, might be seen as a response to the need for continuing professional education for leaders (Rønning 2013).

1.2.4. Existential-humanistic ideas in coaching

In one way or another, coaching leadership is a combination of coaching and leadership. Due to my background in counselling, and since relational perspectives on coaching leadership are predominant in this study, the emphasis will be on the coaching dimension to a larger degree than on the leadership dimension. The theoretical anchoring of the coaching concept, which is based on existential-humanistic principles, will be given much attention in this thesis. In the following, some of the main principles of this perspective will be presented.

Bearing the distinction between professional coaching and the coaching-as-approach perspective – made in section 1.2.1. – in mind, professional coaching is understood as a professional *helping* relationship (Kvalsund, 2005a; Moen, 2009a) involving a coach and a coachee (Bachirova, Cox, & Clutterbuck, 2014; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2005; Whitmore, 2011).⁸ It is designed to assist normally functioning people (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2005a) to realise their personal resources and unlock their potential (Whitmore, 2011). The coach does not necessarily have expertise in the professional area of development of the coachee (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2005a; Whitmore, 2011). For instance, if a

⁸ It is important to note, already here, that in relation to coaching leadership, the notion of the leader-employee relationship as a helping relationship is problematized and discussed, particularly in Chapter 3.

leader engages (as the coachee) in a process with an executive coach, the latter is an external professional coach who has expert competence in facilitating the process of exploration and discovery of the leader (the coachee), rather than being an expert in the leader's professional field as such.

Joseph (2014) proposes that a commonly accepted belief in the coaching field is the "general ethos" that each individual ultimately knows what is right for her as the answers and solutions to her situation are to be found within herself. Bearing this assumption in mind, the coaching process means the coach helps the coachee to discover the inner resources needed for the matter in question (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2014).

In this perspective, coaching is seen as a cooperative, co-constructive, collaborative process that enables the coachee to discover her capacity to take charge of her own process (Joseph, 2014). The role of the coach is to be an active, supportive and friendly listener who fully and inexorably believes in the coachee's power and capacity to find her own solutions (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Kvalsund, 2005a). Bearing this in mind, the expertise of the coach is about establishing conditions for growth, learning and discovery by creating a trusting relationship with the coachee, and stimulate the coachee's process of exploration, a process that is likely to lead to new insight and understanding (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Kvalsund, 2005a). In this sense, coaching is regarded as a cooperative process based on an ideal of mutuality and equity between the coach and the coachee (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Moen, 2009, Stelter, 2014a).

One question arising in the wake of such an understanding of coaching is whether and how these principles might be transferred to the leadership context, an issue that will be further explored in Chapters 3 and 6. As mentioned in section 1, issues of power and responsibility will be particularly addressed in the discussion on whether coaching leadership is ethically defensible and theoretically possible. For instance, there will be a discussion on what a helping perspective means with regards to the leader-employee relationship, and what the ethical challenges might be when being both the leader who is principally entitled to employ, dismiss and determine the working conditions of the employee (McCarthy & Milner, 2013), and the "coach" who encourages personal engagement and exploration, although still in relation to the professional area (Alrø & Nilles, 2015).

1.3. Coaching leadership

This section presents a further outline of the coaching leadership concept promoted in this thesis. A brief review of coaching leadership research will be presented, which in turn will lead to reflections on the originality and significance of the present study.

1.3.1. Encompassing the understanding of coaching leadership

In this thesis leadership is defined as “*a process in which one individual influences a group of individuals in order to reach a common goal*” (Northouse, 2007, p. 3). The leadership concept is delimited to so-called “assigned” leadership (Northouse, 2007), referring to leaders in formal, professional leadership positions in professional organisations, that is, contexts in which people are engaged in professional, paid formal working conditions (Ackroyd, Kilpatrick, & Walker, 2007).

Furthermore, the concept of coaching leadership promoted in this thesis is anchored in the existential-humanistic understanding of professional coaching briefly presented above. This essentially implies that the leader regards her employees as resourceful, creative agents (Whitworth et al., 2009), and that she shares responsibility and power by involving herself in cooperative relationships with her employees (Anderson, 2013). Moreover, coaching leadership is about creating an environment in which people feel understood, accepted and valued for whom they are (Joseph, 2006; Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). It is associated with a work climate within which personal differences can be valued and explored (McClure, 1998).

In coaching leadership, the leader looks for possibilities to take a coaching approach to her employees (McCarthy & Milner, 2013), which implies asking questions rather than providing answers and solutions (Berg, 2006; Moen & Kvalsund, 2008), listening rather than telling and attempting to establish contact with the interlocutor in dialogic conversations in which she genuinely intends to empathically understand the employee as she understands herself (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). This involves a facilitative approach to situations and processes within the organisation, meaning that the leader aims to create relational conditions for growth, development, learning and discovery among the employees, rather than being the expert who primarily controls and governs (Whitmore, 2011).

Coaching leadership is about the leader seeing herself as a facilitator of organisational processes by viewing both herself and her employees as resourceful agents who might, in a cooperative, co-constructive, collaborative (Stelter, 2014a)

fellowship, enhance each other's learning and development. The main tools of the coaching leader are to ask questions and listen attentively (Joseph, 2014). However, coaching leadership is also believed to require an existential-humanistic attitude in the encounter with the employee, because this attitude is regarded as the cornerstone in creating relations that foster growth and development (Kvalsund, 2005a; Rogers, 1961/2004).

In coaching leadership, the leader assumes, in one way or another, the role of the coach, as opposed to executive coaching where the leader becomes the coachee (Joo et al., 2012). Again, this does not mean that the leader-as-coach is to be understood on the same terms as the professional coach, an issue that will be discussed at length in this thesis, particularly in Chapters 3 and 6. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, coaching leadership differs from professional coaching in that it does not necessarily take place in structured conversations labelled "coaching" (Turner & McCarthy, 2015). As such, coaching in the leadership context might as well occur in informal situations that have been called "corridor coaching" (Grant, 2010; Grant & Green, 2003), "anytime coaching" (Kloster & Swire, 2010) and "coaching on the fly" (Johnson, 2011). These are situations where the coaching approach is taken as a result of "coachable moments" that occur in various formal and informal contexts within leadership (Hart, 2005; Kaye, 1993; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Mobley, 2011).

1.3.2. Coaching leadership and other leadership forms

In this thesis coaching leadership is understood as a "leadership form" (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013) where the leader looks for opportunities to take a coaching approach where this is considered adequate. In other words, coaching leadership does not imply that the leader uses coaching in *all* situations within her leadership, but rather, coaching is regarded as one approach among other approaches to leadership situations (Anderson, 2013; Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). Hence, the term "coaching leadership", which has been chosen to describe the phenomenon being studied in this thesis, does not imply that coaching is the norm according to which every action taken by the leader is to be evaluated. Rather, it is suggested that in given situations, other interventions than asking questions and listening (interventions associated with the coaching approach), such as giving advice, feedback or instruction, might be more appropriate (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013).

Nor is it proposed that coaching leadership should replace other leadership concepts. On the contrary, it is assumed that coaching leadership might be compatible with a variety of leadership theories. The ways in which coaching leadership relates to such theoretical frameworks is, however, outside the scope of this thesis. The use of the term coaching leadership implies that leadership is understood, explored and examined from a coaching point of view, rather than the other way around.

1.3.3. Relational aspects and the possibility of mutuality

This study focuses on relational aspects of coaching leadership. Because of their focus on relationships that are believed to foster personal and relational learning, growth and development, theories emanating from the field of counselling and psychotherapy, existential-humanistic theories, have been chosen to constitute the framework for this study, as shown in section 1.2.4. above. Again, this underpins the fact that the main emphasis in this thesis is on the coaching dimension rather than the leadership aspect. In gestalt terminology, coaching is figure, whereas leadership is ground (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey et al., 2012). Coaching is the activity and process, whereas leadership is the context according to which this activity and process is understood.

In this thesis, taking an existential-humanistic perspective on coaching leadership implies that the *attitude* of the leader is the most emphasised part of the coaching endeavour (Alrø & Nilles, 2015; Joseph, 2014; Kvalsund, 2005a; Spinelli & Horner, 2008). This implies a willingness to understand the lifeworld of the employee, on her terms, and to engage in a dialogue where both sides and perspectives might be explored and addressed (Kvalsund, 2005a). The aim is to create an environment in which the employees can develop, learn and grow. Concepts from the relationally oriented, developmental theory proposed by Rogers (1959, 1980/1995, 1961/2004) are presented in Chapter 2 in order to understand the basic characteristics of such a developmental environment.

As touched on above, from an existential-humanistic perspective, the most predominant intervention of the coach is connected to her ability to listen attentively and empathically⁹ to the coachee, helping her to clarify her worldview, and through her process of discovering the resources within herself, to be enabled to act and relate

⁹ Reflective or active listening involves a variety of communicative tools (Ivey, Packard, & Ivey, 1998; Kvalsund, 2006).

more positively in the world (Joseph, 2014; Moen & Kvalsund, 2008; Spinelli & Horner, 2008). Transferred to the leadership context, this means that coaching leadership is about asking questions and listening rather than providing solutions, answers and conclusions (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2006, 2014; Kvalsund, 2005a; Spinelli & Horner, 2008).

Furthermore, from an existential-humanistic point of view, coaching involves an ideal of symmetry, mutuality and interdependence: the coach and the coachee engage in a mutual, cooperative relationship in which the developmental process of the coachee is the focus, but where both parties contribute their specific, role-related competence (Kvalsund, 2005a; Stelter, 2014a). This is, however, an area that will be thoroughly discussed in relation to coaching leadership. The question is whether such mutuality is achievable in the leader-employee relationship that is bound by formal structures where the leader is entitled to make decisions regarding the every-day life and working conditions of the employee (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Moreover, this will inspire a discussion of whether coaching leadership is at all a theoretical possibility.

1.3.4. A brief review of coaching leadership research

A selection of research findings in the field of coaching leadership will be presented below. This selection is based on an overview of the field gained from literature searches in the databases PsycINFO, Web of Science (ISI) and Google Scholar, as well as the reading of other scholars' reviews of research in the field and further search into the literature referred to in these publications.

Several studies with various designs have been carried out to improve our knowledge about how coaching leadership might be understood, used and perceived by employees and leaders, and about factors that might impede or foster coaching in the leadership context (Hagen, 2012). For instance, it has been shown that leaders who regularly display behaviours related to coaching (Hagen, 2012) are likely to be perceived as effective leaders by employees, peers and their own leaders (Luthans, Hodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1988). Leader styles and approaches that indicate ineffective coaching behaviour have been identified by Ellinger, Hamlin, and Beattie (2008).

Ellinger et al. (2014) suggest that since managerial coaching is not a formal learning strategy, as opposed to “specialist coaching” (Anderson, 2013), it is important to understand which factors might prevent or encourage managerial coaching in organisations. Several studies have explored factors that influence the leader’s propensity to coach. For instance, research has shown that leaders who believe that personal qualities can be developed (incremental theory) are more likely to coach, in terms of helping others develop, than leaders who do not believe in the individual’s ability to develop personal attributes (entity theory) (Heslin, Vandewalle, & Latham, 2006).

Gilley, Gilley, and Kouider (2010) found that leaders’ abilities to motivate others and encourage growth and development were the greatest predictors of their use of coaching in the workplace. Furthermore, Anderson’s (2013) research indicates that experience, age and level of leader qualifications are unlikely to affect a leader’s tendency to coach, but factors such as occupational self-efficacy and leader-employee relationship are predictors of the propensity to coach. The inclination leaders have to use coaching in informal situations within leadership, so-called “coachable moments”, has been specifically examined by Turner and McCarthy (2015). Their study indicates that time, skills and relationships are key factors in a leader’s propensity to take advantage of “coachable moments”. In a recent study, the gender perspective was brought into the field of coaching leadership by Ye, Wang, Hein Wendt, Wu & Euwena (2016), who found that female managers were coaching more than male managers.

Some studies have investigated the *effect* of coaching leadership in relation to different variables. For instance, positive links have been found between coaching leadership and employee performance (Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003; Liu & Batt, 2010). Moreover, it has been shown that managerial coaching has a significantly positive effect on organisational commitment and a significantly negative relationship to turnover intention, which indicates that the manager’s coaching skills is connected to employees’ wish to stay in the organization (Park, Yang, & MacLean, 2008). A significantly positive relationship has been identified between coaching leadership and sales performance (Agarwall, Angst, & Magni, 2009). It has been found that coaching leadership has positive effects on project management outcomes, for instance the ability to complete a project on time and within the budget (Hagen,

2010). Coaching leadership is also shown to impact team performance in creativity and efficiency (Mulec & Roth, 2005). A significant relation between managers' coaching skills and employees' learning has been identified by Park, Yang, and McLean (2008).

Some qualitative studies have examined leaders' perceptions and experience of coaching leadership. For instance, Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) conducted a qualitative study that explored managers' beliefs related to managerial coaching by using the critical-incidents methodology. They found that the managers in the study made a clear distinction between coaching and management: whereas coaching is perceived as empowering and supportive, and an approach that removes obstacles and helps people grow and develop, management is understood as telling, judging, controlling and directing. Interestingly, the managers in this study saw these two dimensions as incompatible in that they were perceived as belonging to different areas of what they did in their work as managers. Finding a way of dynamically switching between roles seems to be an important part of managerial coaching, according to the findings of this study. Talarico (2002) found that critical elements for becoming an effective coaching manager were related to the managers receiving coaching themselves and coaching others, having coaching role models and experiencing an organisational expectation to coach. Baker-Finch (2011) found that leaders feel more comfortable in formal, structured coaching situations for which they can be prepared than coaching in informal contexts within their leadership.¹⁰

1.3.5. The significance and originality of this study

There are few studies on coaching leadership that focus on the leader perspective (Beattie et al., 2014; Gomez & Gunn, 2012). According to Beattie et al. (2014), *“the apparent benefits of managerial coaching have been established primarily for those recipients of coaching. Future research should therefore examine the benefits that managers receive from serving as coaches, and being engaged in coaching relationships relative to their own learning and development”* (p. 97). This study

¹⁰ This report is an assignment from the Master of Business Coaching from the University of Wollongong. The study has been referred to by Grace McCarthy, an important researcher in the field of coaching leadership (i.e. McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Since these findings are interesting in relation to this project, the study has also been included in the thesis. The field of coaching leadership is still in its infancy, as shown above, and it has therefore been necessary to include a few master studies as well as some of the literature which is, in a sense, critiqued in the opening lines of this introduction: the literature with a prescriptive and anecdotal flavour (Anderson et al., 2009; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). However, a guiding principle in the process has been to choose peer-reviewed literature in cases where this exists.

aims to help reduce this research gap by exploring the phenomenon coaching leadership through investigating the lived experience of leaders.

Developing knowledge about outcomes and possible benefits of coaching leadership as perceived and experienced by the leaders themselves might have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study might contribute to an important discussion in the field of coaching leadership, namely, about the extent to which theories and methods can be transferred directly from “specialist coaching” (Anderson, 2013) into the leadership context (McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Molly-Søholm et al., 2013; Anderson, 2013). Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) claim that the transfer of coaching theories from the therapeutic area is a categorical mistake and assert that the theory of coaching leadership must be adjusted to the leadership context to a greater degree than what has been done to date. Research into the leader perspective might provide valuable insights into how the relevant theory might be further developed in relation to practice. The practical significance of exploring leaders’ experience of coaching leadership and their perception of how it influences leadership might help future leaders make sense of coaching leadership, and help educators design adequate and relevant courses and education programmes for leaders in coaching leadership.

The originality of this study lies in the fact that there is variation in the interviewed leaders’ prerequisites and conditions for coaching. Whereas the leaders in the studies of, for instance, Talarico (2002) and Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) have been selected for their perceived excellence in being coaching leaders, no such criteria have been applied here. The leaders in this study have all been through the same ten-day coaching course, but they work in different organisations in terms of size and type of work. Public and private organisations are represented, and the number of employees for whom the leaders have personnel responsibility varies from less than ten to more than 100.

The group of leaders also represents a wide range of leadership experience and education levels. The formal factor linking the leaders is the coaching course that they have all been through. Questions can thus be asked as to whether, in spite of the differences, there are common denominators in the leaders’ experience. How do the leaders experience using coaching in their everyday life as leaders? Studying the experience of leaders with different backgrounds and motivations for coaching and

who are employed in different work contexts might contribute to gaining valuable insight into how coaching leadership can be understood.

1.4. Research question and research design

In the following, the research question and research design of this study will be outlined, the role of the coaching course that the informants have been through will be initially discussed, the selection criteria of the study will be presented and, finally, some important aspects of the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach will be addressed.

In this project I am interested in exploring leaders' experience of coaching leadership, and in investigating how coaching might influence leadership. The research question of the study is:

How is coaching leadership experienced by leaders, and how does coaching influence leadership?

To explore the lived experience of coaching leadership from a leader perspective a qualitative research design with a phenomenological-hermeneutical approach has been chosen. A total of 20 informants¹¹ have participated in the study. Ten leaders from different Norwegian companies who have attended a specific coaching course have participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. 16 informants have participated in two focus-group interviews. Five of the leaders participating in the individual interviews also took part in one of the focus-group sessions, whereas one informant participated in both focus groups. The data material in the study consists of ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting from one and a half to two hours, and two focus-group interviews, each lasting one and a half hours. The interviews have been transcribed verbatim and analysed according to the principles of phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis proposed by Lindseth and Nordberg (2004). Methodological aspects of the study will be presented in Chapter 4.

¹¹ The word "informant" is consequently used in this thesis and refers to the individuals who have shared their experience of coaching leadership in this project. More commonly used concepts are "participant" or "interviewee" (e.g. Rowley, 2012, Silverman, 2006). However, if I had used the term "participant", it might have created confusion, since this word is frequently used while referring to something else: the participation in the coaching course. Similarly, the word "interviewee" does not seem adequate in cases where the research project as a whole rather than just the interview is addressed.

1.4.1. The role of the coaching course in this study

A specific coaching course has been chosen as a part of the research context, in the sense that participation in this coaching course has been a condition for being an informant in the study, and that it serves as a common point of reference in the group of informants and in the interaction between me as the researcher and the informants. This course, developed in cooperation with a Norwegian university, consists of two three-day modules and one four-day module, with a time-span of 4-5 months. The course has been held for many years, hence many classes have completed the course.

The pedagogical design of the course draws on principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014) in that the participants are challenged to engage in personal learning processes through exercises, group discussions, plenary discussions and the writing of learning journals (Moon, 1999). In the exercises, techniques associated with active listening are emphasised, such as the use of minimal encouragements and open and closed questions, paraphrasing and summary (Ivey, Gluckstern Packard, & Bradford Ivey, 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). Furthermore, gestalt oriented techniques such as calling attention to paralanguage and body language and the active use of imagination and role play are trained (Kvalsund, 2005a). The theoretical framework of the course primarily draws on Norwegian coaching literature (i.e. Gjerde, 2010; Kvalsund, 2005a), and the phrase: "*learning is discovery*" is crucial both to the epistemological assumption of the course and the theoretical understanding of coaching (Grendstad, 1985).

However, in order not to reveal the identity of the informants, the course can only be described to a limited degree in this thesis, and it is considered that, for instance, the curriculum of the course cannot be exposed in its entirety. As will be further described in chapter 4, section 4.3.1, the confidentiality of the *employees* of the leaders who have participated in this study has been a core aspect of the approval of this research from the Norwegian Ethics committee for social research: NSD (Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste). Since the relationship between the leader and the employee is emphasised in this study, the employees are *indirectly* involved in this research through the accounts of the leaders. For this reason, maintaining the confidentiality of both the employees and the leaders have been a crucial part of the ethical dimension of this study. Bearing this in mind it is

important not to reveal too much information about the coaching course that the leaders have completed.

However, because of the epistemological assumptions underpinning this project, it is assumed that neither the curriculum nor documents addressing the pedagogical purpose and structure of the course are particularly important in relation to this research. This study is not a “memory experiment” in which the amount or degree of knowledge that can be remembered and displayed from the course by the informants is tested in relation to the aim of the course. Rather, this research acknowledges the pragmatic dimensions of learning (Dewey, 1938/1997; Kvalsund, 2015b). This means that the study is not concerned with *what is learned* in relation to the *purpose* of the course, rather its aim is to explore the meaning of coaching leadership as the leaders experience it.

In interviewing the leaders, it is therefore of no importance *what* the leaders remember from the course in terms of concrete theoretical models or practical techniques. What is in focus is in what ways coaching has become meaningful, applicable, manageable or useful for them *in their leadership* – or the opposite: how it has become *anything but* meaningful, applicable, manageable or useful for them in their leadership. Every kind of experience is of interest in this respect.

It cannot be known, nor is it of any interest for this research *where* the informants in the study have derived their knowledge or competence about coaching from. It could be that they felt they had learned as much, or more, about coaching from completely different contexts than from the coaching course in question here. The informants could have been inspired to use coaching in their leadership by a television programme they have seen, a book they have read or a completely different coaching course they have been through before or after the coaching course that is actualised in this study.

Considering this, it is of no interest whether there has been a time span of one, six or 15 months between the termination of the course and the research interview. In relation to the pragmatic (Dewey, 1938/1997; Kvalsund, 2015b) epistemology of this study, one might even believe that an informant who had completed the coaching course 1.5 years before the interview might talk about a more “profound” experience of coaching leadership than a leader who had just gone through the course, because she had had more time to practise, reflect on and experiment with the knowledge and competence acquired in the course than an informant who had just terminated the

course. However, the degree of “profoundness”, validity or reliability of experience is not of interest for evaluation in this study. The focal point is how the leaders experience coaching leadership here-and-now, in relation to their everyday context as leaders, rather than what, or how much they are able to recall of what happened there-and-then in the coaching course. To the extent that questions are asked in the interview about the leaders’ experience of the coaching course, this merely serves as a way into their experience of coaching leadership, not as a way of surveying their memories, evaluations or experience of the course per se.

However, it must be pointed out that the course has served as more than simply a recruitment arena for the study. If it had been, I could have contacted any leader who had shown interest in the course and who had been in touch with the course teachers. Some common ground for understanding the coaching concept has, however, been of importance in this process, related to the manifold (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004) and nascent (Ellinger et al., 2014) coaching field, which has been addressed in section 1.2.2 above. Sharing a common point of reference made the interview conversations easier than what might have been the case if the leaders had been through completely different courses, or if some had been through a course and others had not. This does not, however, imply that there has been an assumption that everyone who has been through the course shares the same perception or understanding of the coaching concept.

1.4.2. A course in coaching or a course in coaching leadership?

The course in question is consequently referred to as a “coaching course” rather than a “coaching leadership course”. The interviewed leaders in the study consequently refer to the “coaching course” or the “coaching study” in the interviews, rather than calling it a coaching leadership course. This might also be due to the fact that the course is formally addressed in the curriculum and planning documents as the “coaching study” by the company offering the course.

This does not imply that the course aims at educating so called “specialist” coaches (Anderson, 2013) or “professional” coaches (Lane et al., 2014). Rather, it applies to leaders and others who wish to develop coaching competence, in terms of theoretical knowledge and practical skills for use in various contexts. In this sense, it can be called a *coaching course*, rather than a *coaching leadership course*. In the

course setting, the distinction between coaching and coaching leadership is not specifically addressed. Theories of leadership and organisations are touched upon, but they do not form a key part of the curriculum or the theoretical lectures. Neither does the literature in the curriculum primarily address coaching leadership or explicitly use the term coaching leadership. If this had been the case, the course might not have appealed to individuals who are *not* in leader positions, which it seems to do, as several of my co-students were in other kinds of positions than leader positions. How can this course, then, be considered a relevant frame of reference in a study that addresses coaching leadership rather than coaching as its primary concept?

The course might, in a sense, be considered a coaching leadership course because of its experiential pedagogical design, as described above. Since every participant is challenged throughout the course to reflect on his or her own relation to and experience of the theories presented and the exercises that are carried out along the way, it is believed that the leaders interpret the theories and exercises in relation to the context where they intend to actualise their coaching competence. In carrying out coaching conversations as a part of the homework between the modules, the leaders are also challenged to directly apply this competence in their everyday context as leaders. Bearing this in mind, the course might be regarded as a *coaching leadership course* for leaders. For a teacher or a priest who goes through the course, it might, on the other hand, be considered a “coaching teachership” course or a “coaching priesthood” course. In other words, in the course, one is taught about coaching, and it is up to every participant to decide the context in which the competence gained will be actualised.

I participated in one of the classes in this course, together with some of the participants who eventually became informants in this project, although not as an observing researcher but as an ordinary participant. My primary motivation for attending the course was to “tune into” the coaching field and develop my coaching competence. However, while engaging in discussions with the leaders, my curiosity arose as to how they would take their understanding of coaching with them into their respective leadership contexts. The decision to make the coaching course part of the context of the study arose during the course, and was also influenced with this emergent curiosity and research interest in mind. The possible impact of this dual role

as researcher and co-participant in the course is further addressed in the methodology section below.

In the contact with potential informants in the recruitment phase (see Appendices B and C) and in the interviews it was clarified, as pointed out above, that the aim of this study is not to evaluate the coaching course. Therefore, it is outside the scope of this study to measure, explore or evaluate the impact of the coaching course in relation to its aim, structure and learning environment. It has been pointed out that the experience of leaders who do not find the course beneficial or do not view coaching as useful in their leadership is just as interesting to this project as the experience of those who express positive experiences.

1.4.3. Selection criteria

One criterion of selection in the process of recruiting informants to this research was, as mentioned above, that the potential informants had participated in a class in the coaching course described above. A second selection criterion was that the informants were in a leader position while attending the course. The third selection criterion was that the leaders actually had experience of coaching leadership, as it is the lived experience of the phenomenon, rather than opinions and ideas about the phenomenon, that is of interest in phenomenological research (van Manen, 1997; Smith et al., 2009).

Without it being a selection criterion as such, I searched for a heterogeneous group of informants in terms of, for instance, their reasons for attending the course, expectations for the course, experience of the course, and, most important of all, in terms of the work contexts in which they were intending to actualise their coaching competence. In this sense, it is important that they have been recruited from a course setting external to their respective organisations. Investigating coaching leadership in a shared leadership context, in the sense that all the leaders belonged to the same organisation, would have been a fundamentally different study.

1.4.4. The phenomenological-hermeneutic approach

My research aims to grasp the essential meaning of the phenomenon coaching leadership by exploring the lived experience of leaders who use coaching in their leadership. In its most fundamental form the study asks: “*what is the experience of coaching leadership like?*” A key aspect of the phenomenological approach is the concept of “bracketing” (Husserl, 1970/1900) or “bridling” (Dahlberg, 2006) the researcher’s pre-understanding regarding the phenomenon being studied. Choosing a hermeneutically-oriented phenomenological path implies a greater focus on the interpretative element than in a more “pure” descriptive branch of phenomenology (Dowling, 2004, 2007; Finlay, 2008). According to Heidegger (1927/1962), as human beings we cannot escape from our historicity, but rather we are embedded in the world, and thus suspending our pre-understanding would imply suspending ourselves from our being-in-the-world (Finlay, 2008). Gadamer (1960/2013) suggests that we must discriminate between the pre-conceptions that enable us to understand in new ways and those that prevent us from developing our understanding, or expanding our “horizon”. From a hermeneutical point of view, understanding lived experience always involves an element of interpretation (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

My research interest is to encompass the experiential meaning of coaching leadership from the perspective of the leaders, irrespective of the aim of the coaching course they have been through or my theoretical assumptions regarding the phenomenon coaching leadership. This means that as a researcher I give the interpretative priority to the interviewed leaders when it comes to the understanding of coaching leadership. However, in analysing the data, the phenomenon of coaching leadership emerges in an interactive process where the accounts of the leaders encounter the perspective of the research and the researcher (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) in terms of the scope, aim and research question and the theoretical tools I have at my disposal in order to interpret and understand the experiences that emerge through the interviews. The ways in which the findings of the study emerge as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the informants, between the text and the reader, are elaborated on in Chapter 4.

1.5. The structure of the thesis

This chapter has introduced the field of coaching and coaching leadership and presented an existential-humanistic perspective on coaching. An outline of research in the area of coaching leadership has been given and the significance and originality of the present study has been suggested. Furthermore, the research question and the purpose and design of the study have been presented. The role of the coaching course and the selection criteria have been accounted for, and finally, core aspects of the methodology for the study have been outlined.

In Chapter 2, the existential-humanistic framework for understanding coaching and coaching leadership will be presented. Key concepts around which the theory is organised, such as self-actualisation, acceptance, congruence, experience, mutuality and empathy will be explained and discussed. The leadership context is included in Chapter 3, which discusses dilemmas and possibilities of coaching leadership, with a focus on a helping perspective and issues of power and ethics in the leader-employee relationship.

In Chapter 4, core principles of the phenomenological hermeneutic approach will be explained, and the qualitative design of the study will be outlined. The role of the coaching course and the selection of, and contact with, the informants will be further discussed, and the group of informants will be presented. Issues of reflexivity and the role of the researcher will be elaborated on and aspects of the semi-structured interviews and the focus-group interviews will then be presented, followed by a discussion on ethical dimensions of the research. Principles and practical procedures of the phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis, which have inspired this project, will be outlined, and a discussion of quality criteria of qualitative research will close the chapter.

The findings of this study will be analysed in Chapter 5 by using three main categories that are believed to reflect the core meaning of the experienced phenomenon coaching leadership: self-confidence, integration and connectedness. These three main categories have their nine subcategories.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings from this research in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis and selected research. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed and suggestions for further research are provided.

2. An existential-humanistic perspective on coaching

The theoretical framework of this thesis has been divided into two chapters. Whereas this chapter addresses the coaching concept according to existential-humanistic perspective, from the viewpoint of professional coaching,¹² Chapter 3 includes the leadership context and examines how principles from professional coaching might apply to the leader-employee relationship in an organisational context. This implies the assumption that coaching leadership is a concept that should be understood as qualitatively different from “professional” coaching: it is assumed that being a coaching leader is different from being a professional coach (Anderson, 2013; Anderson, Rainer & Schyns, 2009), as mentioned in the introduction.

Moreover, as the coaching field is characterised by a multitude of perspectives and a mosaic of theoretical directions (Cox, Bachirova & Clutterbuck, 2014; Palmer & Whybrow, 2008), a thorough clarification of the understanding of coaching that underpins this study seems necessary and appropriate. This is the aim of this chapter. Furthermore, coaching leadership is still a nascent field¹³ that has been criticised for being a-theoretical (Ellinger et al., 2014). For this reason, the choice has been made in this thesis to first create a theoretical construction (Chapter 2) on which the coaching leadership concept might be further examined and discussed (Chapter 3). The chapter begins with a discussion on coaching in relation to therapy, and moves on to an introduction of basic concepts in the existential-humanistic perspective. Furthermore, the concepts of self-actualisation, acceptance, congruence, experience, mutuality and empathy are explored and discussed in relation to the coaching context. The chapter continues with a discussion on coaching in relation to other kinds of helping processes, and concludes by discussing existential-humanistic principles from a critical perspective.

¹² As mentioned in the introduction, professional coaching is in this context seen as a contracted process and relationship between a professional coach and a coachee. This kind of coaching might take place in the work context, in terms of an employee in an organisation committing to a coaching process with an external professional coach, or it could be in a life-coaching context, in which a person hires a coach to resolve specific issues. The examples will, however, primarily be taken from the work context.

¹³ The first literature review article in this particular field was published in 2012 by Marcia Hagen.

2.1. Coaching, counselling or therapy?

While the theoretical foundation of this thesis comes from the field of counselling and therapy, it will be argued here that it also applies to the coaching context. The transference of the presented concepts will be clarified as the text unfolds. However, an initial clarification of the term coaching in relation to the concepts counselling and therapy will be given below.

2.1.1. Counselling versus therapy

The terms (psycho-) therapy and counselling tend to be used together, but not necessarily interchangeably (Kwiatkowski, 1998). It has been argued that the differences between these concepts in the helping field are contextual and perceptual rather than qualitative (Kwiatkowski, 1998; Thorne, 1992). First, the terms are used differently in countries such as the US and the UK; in the US, the term therapy is often used about what in the UK would be perceived as counselling (Kwiatkowski, 1998). Similarly, when the term counselling is used in the US, the understanding of it seems closer to what can be understood as guidance (Kwiatkowski, 1998). In other words, the term counselling seems more inclusive in Britain than in the US.

Furthermore, the term therapy seems to entail more professional connotations than the term counselling; the therapist is regarded as more professional than the counsellor, and therapy simply seems to have a higher status than counselling (Kwiatkowski & Dryden, 1989). However, it has been suggested that in the British context, practitioners adhering to person-centred theory,¹⁴ which is in this thesis included in the existential-humanistic perspective, often prefer the term counsellor to the term therapist because it implies a more egalitarian relationship between the helper and the helpee (Thorne, 1984).

Dryden et al. (1989) suggest that the term therapy has been associated with the medical model more often than the term counselling when it comes to appealing to people experiencing mental-health problems over time. On the contrary, counselling is more often associated with normally functioning people who experience temporary

¹⁴ The terms “Rogerian theory” and “person-centred theory” will be used interchangeably in this thesis, referring to the thinking of Carl Rogers. His theory developed through several phases and was initially labelled “non-directive counselling and therapy” (1942). The term “client-centred counselling and therapy” was then formulated and used in the succeeding phase, and the term “person-centred counselling and therapy” was introduced in his book “On becoming a person” in 1961 (Ivey et al., 2012). This development implies an evolution of his ideas, although the basic principles remained throughout his career (Ivey et al., 2012). When the 1959 work of Rogers is referred to in this thesis, it is still referred to as person-centred theory or Rogerian theory, although “person-centred theory” was prevalent at a later stage.

psychological challenges. In the therapeutic domain, the term patient is more often used than the term client (Dryden et al., 1989), a fact that might contribute to the perception that the therapist is more of a professional expert on mental-health issues, whereas the counsellor is regarded more as a bidder of services like other bidders of services (Kwiatkowski, 1998), such as a hairdresser or plumber.

In the Norwegian context, the term counsellor (the Norwegian term “rådgiver” directly translates to “advice-giver”) refers in colloquial speech mostly to an expert giving advice to a less competent person on a specific theme. However, in the helping field, it is used in several contexts as an umbrella concept for the entire field, in the sense that the word counselling incorporates a range of activities, such as coaching, mentoring, guidance, supervision, consultation and therapy (Johannessen, Kokkersvold, & Vedeler, 2010; Kvalsund, 2015a). On the other hand, it is rarely used in the same meaning as the term counselling in either the British or Northern American sense of the term, that is, a practitioner in the helping field is unlikely to call herself “counsellor” (“rådgiver”), due to the ensuing connotations to the expert giving advice. In the Norwegian context it is therefore more relevant to examine the relation between the terms coaching and therapy.

2.1.2. Coaching versus therapy

Hart, Blattner, and Leipsic (2001) studied the perceptions of professionals who offered both coaching and therapeutic services to explore the distinction between coaching and therapy. It seems like the most salient difference promoted in their study is the nature of the relationship in the two helping contexts. The researchers found that the coaching relationship is generally perceived as more equal, informal and cooperative, and is less bound by norms and regulations as to what to do and what not to do than in the therapeutic relationship. The setting of the coaching sessions was much more diverse and free of boundaries than the therapeutic relationship: the coach and the coachee could meet in cafés and arrange sessions on the phone, and could also meet and socialise in different roles and settings, such as playing golf together. Practitioners reported that coachees might announce on social media that they are involved in a coaching process, indicating that there is a certain degree of status associated with being in a coaching process. On the contrary, going to a therapist does not seem to be as openly communicated by the clients as is the case with coaching (Hart et al., 2001). The openness promoted by coachees might thus contribute to

coaches experiencing less secrecy and confidentiality when it comes to the coaching endeavour than is the case for therapy.

In the role of the therapist, on the other hand, the respondents in the above-mentioned study experienced a higher degree of dependency on the part of the client than in the coaching relationship. The issues presented and the way in which the presented issues are received and treated vary in the two contexts; whereas therapy *“encourages awareness of past injuries in order to promote insight and healing”*, the study suggests that the coaching endeavour is more prospective and goal-oriented (Hart et al., 2001, p. 230). The emphasis on past versus future issues, and the degree of goal orientation in various helping contexts might, however, vary in relation to the coach’s theoretical orientation and the unique relationship and process between the helper and the helpee (Cox, Clutterbuck & Bachirova, 2014; Kvalsund, 2005a; Palmer & Whybrow, 2008).

Furthermore, Hart et al. (2001) maintain that *“a lot of therapy can be coaching but not vice-versa”* (p. 232), and suggest that doing therapy requires a different education and training than coaching: *“a coach (...) is not quipped to act as a therapist”* (Hart et al., 2001, p. 232). However, without suggesting that coaching and therapy is the same, it can be argued that therapeutic moments might occur in coaching and that coaching might entail therapeutic effects (Kvalsund, 2005a). Overlaps exist and the boundaries between these two helping contexts are not absolute (Kvalsund, 2005a, 2015a). However, the awareness of the boundaries of one’s competence is a crucial part of a helper’s professionalism and ethical sensitivity (Anderson & Handelsman, 2009; Schein, 2009).

As shown above, it has been argued that the distinction between therapy and counselling is contextual and perception-based rather than qualitative (Kwiatkowski, 1998; Thorne, 1992). Similarly, Joseph (2006, 2014) suggests that coaching, as understood from the viewpoint of person-centred theory, which in this context is included in the existential-humanistic perspective, does not differ from therapy in terms of techniques, models or practical approach. In the theory of Carl Rogers, the relational conditions that are proposed to facilitate growth and development are associated with coaching and are the same as those suggested to alleviate distress and malfunctioning, thus alluding to a therapeutic context. Joseph (2014) argues: *“In essence both require principled non-directivity within the context of a facilitative relationship”* (p. 73).

As Rogerian theory offers a framework for understanding and working with people on all levels of the psychological functioning scale, the difference between person-centred coaching and therapy must be defined in other terms. For instance, as suggested by Hart et al. (2001), there seems to be a practical difference in that the content of therapeutic conversations and coaching encounters tend to differ because the understanding of the two concepts attracts dissimilar clients. For instance, the threshold for seeking the help of a coach rather than a therapist might be lower for some because they feel they avoid potential stigmatising related to the sick and the abnormal (Joseph, 2014).

Bearing this in mind, this thesis acknowledges that existential-humanistic coaching and existential-humanistic therapy draw on the same theoretical foundation (Joseph, 2006, 2014). For this reason, the terms “therapist”, “counsellor” and “client” are used to a certain degree in this chapter, along with the terms “coach” and “coachee”. Similarly, the terms “therapy” and “counselling” are also applied. However, this does not mean that therapy, counselling and coaching are understood as interchangeable concepts in all respects, as discussed above. When the terms counselling, counsellor, therapist and client are used in this thesis, it is because the theorists referred to are using them. Nevertheless, it is assumed in these instances that the concepts presented, although adapted from the field of counselling and therapy, apply to the coaching context. The way in which they are considered to be transferable will be clarified along the way. Other terms that will be used to a great extent are the more general nouns “helper” and “helpee”. These will be applied when the theories presented are believed to apply to any kind of professional, and in some cases also non-professional helping relationships.

In the following, an outline of the basic concepts of the existential-humanistic perspective will be given.

2. 2. An introduction to the existential-humanistic perspective

The philosophical foundation on which the theories described in this chapter are built might be labelled the existential-humanistic perspective. As this term indicates, this perspective includes both existentialism and humanism (Schneider & Krug, 2010). However, in the context of counselling and psychotherapy they are frequently combined to make a common set of beliefs and assumptions that has been characterized as the “third force” in the field (Ivey et al., 2012). This thinking is a

reaction to earlier “forces”, psychoanalysis and behaviourism, that are considered reductionist and deterministic (Ivey et al., 2012). Behaviourism with Skinner as its primary proponent has been considered to reduce the human being to a machine- or animal-like creature exclusively driven by responses to various stimuli from the environment (DeRobertis, 2013; Ivey et al., 2012). Furthermore, Freud’s psychoanalysis is considered to undermine individual freedom by reducing the individual to a product of her childhood experiences (DeRobertis, 2013; Ivey et al., 2012). The existential-humanistic movement is more optimistic when it comes to the individual’s ability to take charge of and actively construct and create her life. According to Schneider and Krug (2010), existential-humanistic therapy “*combines existential accents on human limitation with humanistic accents on human possibilities*” (p. 6).

2.2.1. Existentialism

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is considered by many to be the founder of existentialistic philosophy (Ivey et al., 2012; Johannessen et al., 2010; Michelman, 2008; Schneider & Krug, 2010; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). He formalised ideas stemming from Socratic thinking, the Renaissance, Romanticism and Asian sources (Schneider & Krug, 2010), and maintains that freedom emerges from crisis, which is again associated with intellectual, emotional or physical imprisonment. He objected to the hegemonic position often held and maintained by the church and the robot-like obedience religious systems seemed to prefer (Schneider & Krug, 2010). According to Kierkegaard, (1844/1944), “*whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility*” (p. 156). He promotes a sometimes night-dark view of the human condition although it is still associated with the concept of possibility. He holds that the individual: “*can demand absolutely nothing of life and that terror, perdition, and annihilation live next door to every man*” (Kierkegaard, 1844/1944, p. 156).

This inherent meaninglessness of existence is emphasised in Albert Camus’ book “The Myth of Sisyphus”, originally from 1947. He refers to the ancient Greek myth about Sisyphus who was doomed to infinitely and repeatedly push a boulder up a mountain. When the boulder was at the top, it rolled down again, and Sisyphus had to start all over again. The myth illustrates the immanent absurdity of human life. No external frame of reference can provide the meaning that the human being

involuntarily searches for. Every person must create meaning in her own life (Ivey et al., 2012; Michelman, 2012).

In the encounter with the boundary of life, death, every person is ultimately alone and the recognition of this existential loneliness is a source of anxiety (Ivey et al., 2012; Schneider & Krug, 2010). However, it also implies an existential choice. As individuals, we can choose existential commitment by connecting to the world and acting on the world rather than merely letting the world act on us. We can choose to become agents in our lives and intentionally face events, placing the locus of control within ourselves rather than in external frames, systems or individuals (Ivey et al., 2012). Based on such a perspective, we actively construct our world and the meaning of our life and respond to the existential responsibility to choose our own path in life. An opposing perspective would be to passively allow the world to act on us. A person who constantly blames external factors for what happens in her life will become disconnected and alienated, and will have an external locus of control. She becomes a passive object in her own life (Ivey et al., 2012).

2.2.2. Humanistic psychology and the impact of Carl Rogers

Humanistic psychology assumes that individuals are unique human beings, infinitely valuable simply because of their humanity (Ivey et al., 2012). The American “human potential movement” grew during the 1960s and peaked in the following decade (DeRobertis, 2013). Abraham Maslow is considered to be a key voice in this movement with his introduction of the hierarchy of needs (1954). The human being is believed to be naturally and continuously striving towards self-actualisation, and human psychology and behaviour might be understood in light of this motivational and need-driven process (Ivey et al., 2012). When basic needs, such as the need for food, water, digestion and physical wellbeing have been fulfilled, individuals can move to higher levels in the hierarchy. People who reach the highest level of the hierarchy, self-actualisation, might fully realise their potential as human beings (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003). The principle of self-actualisation is foundational in the theory of Carl Rogers, who is also considered to be an important theorist within the human potential movement (Hutterer, 1993). His theory will be thoroughly outlined below.

However, as an introduction, it can be said that Rogers’ theory represented a revolutionary turn in the field of counselling and psychotherapy (Ivey et al., 2012).

His introduction of the term “client” to replace “patient” reflected, in his time, a willingness to equate the relationship between the therapist and the client (Ivey et al., 2012; Kvalsund, 2015a). Rather than relying on his expertise as a therapist, he displayed a strong belief in the client’s capacity to solve her own issues and saw the therapeutic task not as “*construction or reconstruction or manipulating or shaping. Instead, it is one of facilitation, of removing obstacles to growth and helping to release that which has always been there*” (Yalom, 1995; p. xi). The phrase “*experience is, for me, the highest authority*” (Rogers, 1961/2004, p. 23) was a guiding light throughout his career, and, apparently, in encounters within various arenas. The experience of the client was the ultimate guide in the therapeutic process, the “touchstone of validity” (Rogers, 1961/2004) against which the therapist’s various interventions could be checked. As will be further elaborated on below, according to Rogers (1961/2004, 1980/1995), the experience of the therapist was also considered to be part of the therapeutic process, whether it was acknowledged or not, and this could be a resource if the therapist is able to be transparent and genuine and regard herself as a person in relation to the client, insofar as the client is a person in relation to the therapist (Ivey et al., 2012). Being a professional therapist was thus no longer about making skilful interpretations of the clients’ psyche, which was the expertise of the psychoanalyst, or giving the adequate stimuli for behavioural change to be promoted, as was the most conspicuous quality of the behaviourally oriented therapist (Ivey et al., 2012).

Another revolutionary turn represented by Rogers is the way in which he opened the therapeutic space for everyone who is willing to see and listen (Hutterer, 1993; Ivey et al., 2012). He embedded his central ideas of genuineness and transparency in his research and his writings by employing a personal approach in his writing and by exposing his flaws and limitations to the audience with a “*breath-taking honesty*” (Yalom, 1995, p. xii). Although he maintained his key concepts throughout his career, he constantly revised his theory through his research. In his encounter with critics, he demonstrated his theoretical principle of experience being the highest authority by not relapsing into dogmatism – he argued for his ideas while at the same time offering his opponents the space to explore their experience, just as his clients were encouraged to explore their experience. He participated in dialogues with both devotees and adversaries (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989). One like-

mindful academic present in these dialogues is Martin Buber, who is also considered an important theorist within humanistic psychology (Ivey et al., 2012). The indisputable belief in the human being is accentuated by the Buberian I-Thou theory: every person is worth being treated as a unique and valuable being in her own right, that is, being regarded as a subject, a “Thou”, rather than an object, an “It” (Buber, 1958/2000; Ivey et al., 2012).

2.2.3. Phenomenological dimensions of the existential-humanistic perspective

In existential humanistic counselling and therapy, the existentialistic imperative of taking charge of one’s life is combined with the belief in the person being able to solve her own problems, where the counsellor’s task is to help her establish contact with her experience in such a way that her potential as a human being might be realised (Ivey et al., 2012; Schneider & Krug, 2010; Yalom, 1995). According to Ivey et al. (2012), a common feature of existential humanistic oriented theories is the focus on the “*clients’ lived experiences, and their interpretations of life events*” (p. 411). This is also illustrative of the primary aim of phenomenology, although phenomenology does not necessarily imply a helping perspective, but rather an understanding of experience within a scientific scope: developing knowledge of phenomena in the world (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology is explicitly connected to existentialism by the established construct “existential phenomenology” (Dowling, 2004; Hansen, 2012; Valle et al., 1989). Heidegger, often referred to as an existential phenomenologist (Hansen, 2012; Dowling, 2004), introduced the concept of “being-in-the-world” (Dowling, 2004; Finlay, 2008). Our existence is not, as in the Cartesian dualistic ontology, disconnected from the world, but rather it is embedded in the world, we are already there (*dasein*) and cannot understand ourselves without considering the world in which we are situated. Ludwig Binswanger suggested that our being can be understood as constituted by our *eigenwelt* (the individual’s inner world, the intrapsychic dimension), the *mit welt* (the relation between two people or more, the social dimension) and the *umwelt* (the society and larger culture which we are part of).

Clemont Vontress included the spiritual dimension, which has been given the name *überwelt* (Ivey et al., 2012). The recognition of this contextual embeddedness in the world implies that as individuals we cannot be separated from our context. This

does not mean, however, that we are passively determined by or mere products of our context, but rather that the meaning of lived experience, the way in which we perceive and understand phenomena in our world, our life-world, exists in the interplay between various aspects of our being. The conditions according to which we understand are not external to, but rather are an inherent part of our being (Finlay, 2008; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). However, this does not mean that we cannot question and challenge them. The phenomenological-hermeneutical researcher strives to examine her prejudice so she can enter into the “phenomenological attitude” (Sokolowski, 2008), that allows her to face the experienced meaning of the phenomenon, so to speak, on its own terms. Similarly, experience is explored within an existential-humanistic counselling context to raise awareness about resources and capabilities, as well as elements that impede the realisation of human potential (Ivey et al., 2012).

2.2.4. John Macmurray, phenomenology and existentialism

Husserl’s phenomenology represents a reaction to the dualism manifested in the Cartesian ontology (Sokolowski, 2008; Zahavi, 1997) that had been characteristic of the philosophical thinking in the centuries after Descartes (Harrison, 1991). Similarly, Macmurray’s philosophy attempts to overcome this dualistic thinking. The Cartesian world is considered to be one “*with deep fissures running through it*” (Harrison, 1991, p. xiii), manifested by the distinction between body and mind, mind and matter, and idealism and materialism (Harrison, 1991). The mind is considered a non-material entity that governs the body.

Macmurray wanted to develop a philosophical standpoint from which reality might be considered a whole within which all parts were organically interrelated (Kirkpatrick, 1991). He proposed an integral perspective on human life and showed how “*the personal relation of persons is constitutive of personal existence*” (Kirkpatrick, 1991, p. 12). The world of action is not split from that of the mind and the thought, rather the human being is relational in its nature, we are agents in relation to other acting individuals in the world and our thinking is formed, informed and reformed by our actions and relations (Godway, 2010). Thinking emerges as a consequence of action, and it is practically and pragmatically oriented: “*We have to withdraw from our engagement with the world and reflect about the situation, imagine different ways of addressing our problem, and consider the consequences of*

choosing one of them” (Godway, 2010, p. 1). Due to Macmurray’s (1957/1991) insistence on agency as a pivotal part of human existence and his emphasis on the individual’s possibility of creating herself in relation to other individuals, he has been considered an existentialist thinker (Godway, 2010).

In this thesis, Macmurray’s theory of persons-in-relation and his exploration of various dimensions of human relationship are an important contribution to the theoretical framework. Whereas Macmurray’s ideas are primarily philosophical, Ragnvald Kvalsund has strongly contributed, together with Eleanor Allgood, to translating his ideas into the counselling field by exploring relational dimensions, such as dependency, independency and interdependency in the counselling relationship (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund, 1998, 2015a).

2.2.5. Gestalt theory in relation to phenomenology and existentialism

Hermeneutical phenomenology is anchored in the assumption that we understand parts in the light of the whole that they are part of (Smith et al., 2009). Similarly, gestalt theory is based on an ontology that acknowledges the human tendency to organize experience, the perceptual field, in a figure-ground organisation (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey et al., 2012). We understand something in the background of something else. The ubiquitous image of the vase and the faces (see Appendix A) illustrates the systemic and holistic perspective of gestalt thinking: if the vase is to appear and come to the foreground, the faces must withdraw to the background. The vase becomes figure and the faces become ground. However, while withdrawing and becoming ground, the faces do not disappear from the field, they rather become the background on which the vase might appear. In a similar way, the various elements of the field are interrelated: they are in constant relation to one another (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey et al., 2012).

Fritz Perls is considered by many to be the founder of gestalt therapy (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey, 2012; Tønnesvang, Hedegaard, & Nygaard, 2013). As opposed to the therapeutic style of Carl Rogers, who primarily relied on active, reflective listening, Perls was directive in his approach to clients (Ivey et al., 2012). He believed in the power of awareness in that *“individuals who became aware of themselves and their experience in the immediacy of the here-and-now can become more authentic and purposeful human beings”* (Ivey et al., 2012, p. 431). He developed a set of techniques with the purpose of helping the client to be aware of who she is and what

she really wants in her life. Gestalt therapy draws on the existentialist idea that individuals are responsible for their actions in the world (Ivey et al., 2012). Furthermore, phenomenological dimensions are present in that the lived experience in the here-and-now is considered the key to understanding the individual's relation to her world (Perls, 1992).

2.2.6. Coaching theories relating to the existential-humanistic perspective

In addition to presenting and discussing theoretical concepts stemming from existential-humanistic oriented counselling and therapy, the theoretical framework proposed in this chapter draws on various literature sources from the coaching field. However, few of these sources claim to be “existential-humanistic”. On the contrary, the perspectives on coaching suggested in these publications are referred to as “gestalt” (e.g. Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014), “person-centred” (e.g. Joseph, 2006, 2014, Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008), “existential” (e.g. Spinelli & Horner, 2008, Spinelli, 2014), “humanistic” (e.g. Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011) and “phenomenological” (e.g. Kvalsund, 2005a; Spinelli & Horner, 2008, Stelter, 2008).

As shown in the previous section, all these theoretical orientations can be linked to the existential-humanistic perspective (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey et al., 2012; Wheeler & Axelsson, 2015). A basic idea in all these perspectives is the indisputable belief in the coachee's ability to take charge of her life in her capacity to find solutions and answers to her challenges. Here the role of the coach is essentially to be present in the relationship in a way that enhances and facilitates the coachee's process of growth and development (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Kvalsund, 2005a;). The acceptance and exploration of the *experience* of the coachee is emphasised as a guiding principle of this process (Alrø & Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Spinelli & Horner, 2008).

Below, theoretical concepts important for understanding coaching in this thesis will be outlined.

2.3. Self-actualisation

Drawing on the motivational theory of Maslow, Rogers (1961/2004) suggests that every person has an immanent “*drive towards self-actualization*” (p. 35). Just as the flower stretches towards the light, reaching for its fullest potential as a flower, the individual will always strive to actualise her fullest potential as a human being (Thorne & Sanders, 2013). However, the conditions of light, water and soil might be of good or poor quality, and thus will influence the ability of the flower to become as beautiful as it can be. In the same way, the growth of the individual depends on environmental conditions. Such conditions are created in the individual’s relationships with other persons, and the interactions with significant others during childhood are of crucial importance for positive self-actualisation to occur (Kvalsund, 2003a). However, just as the flower is able to grow under unfavourable conditions, the human being also actualises herself under all sorts of conditions, but in more or less appropriate ways (Kvalsund, 2003a, Thorne & Sanders, 2013).

If this self-actualising tendency is to move the individual in a positive direction, there must be relationships with growth-enhancing conditions. Growing up in a relational climate without such conditions will impede the positive self-actualising tendency of the child and she will lose contact with her natural ability to trust in her own resources to take charge of her life. This often results in the need for therapy (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). The therapeutic task is to help the client discover her own resources, capabilities and self-confidence to enable her to make her own choices in life (Kirsbaum & Henderson, 1989). The therapist seeks to help her move from a heteronomous dependency on others, and outer locus of control, to an autonomous self-government, and inner locus of control (Rogers, 1959; Thorne, 1991).

The individual’s ability to trust her “organismic valuing process” (Rogers, 1959), might, however, have been undermined by the way in which the child has been treated by her parents in the early-development years (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). For instance, a child raised by a parent who does not show an accepting attitude towards all kinds of responses is likely to develop a non-accepting attitude towards certain responses within herself. An example of this will be used in the following as it sheds light on the most important concept in this thesis, which is the significance of accepting and valuing experience, one’s own and that of others.

2.3.1. The child example

Rogers (1959) uses the example of a child who feels like hitting her little sister to illuminate how the response of a significant other might contribute to creating “conditions of worth” which then become important elements in the person’s self-regard. The example of the child will be used repeatedly throughout the thesis even though the theme of this thesis is not related to the parent-child relationship. The use of the example does not imply the belief that every person who is in need of therapy, and certainly not every person who commits to a coaching process, has been treated by a parent during childhood in the way that will be shown in the following. On the contrary, the example forms the backdrop for understanding the meaning of acceptance as a crucial quality in therapy and, as it will be argued, also in coaching as understood from an existential-humanistic perspective.

If, when the girl hits her little sister, her parent responds by saying: “*You’re not being nice, no one likes you when you do that!*” conflicting feelings arise in the child (Kvalsund, 2003a). The child might hitherto have had the experience of being loved by her parents, and thus is able to love herself. When she hits her little sister, she still loves herself, but if she admits to herself that hitting her little sister feels good, it conflicts with her self-concept as loveable, as determined by the response of her parents (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). The consequence of this is that the experience of feeling loveable while hitting her little sister is rejected and replaced by an experience of not loving herself when she does such a thing. This creates “conditions of worth” (Rogers, 1959) for the child, which means that on given conditions she is loved by her parents and can thus love herself.

In an exact symbolisation, the child would feel good about hitting her sister, but at the same time would experience that her parents do not accept her behaviour. It is of crucial importance that the significant other shows an accepting and understanding attitude towards the experience of the child, for instance, the parents might tell the child that they understand her feeling of anger and also that she wants to hit her sister, but at the same time, they cannot accept the violent action (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). If she is given this type of response, the child will have the opportunity to own her feelings, her “primary experience” (Kvalsund, 2003a), that of feeling angry and wanting to hit her little sister, and she will be enabled to separate herself from the significant others. She can *experience* anger and still feel loved by

her parents but at the same time learn to understand that the *action* emanating from the experience, hitting her sister, is not acceptable. When the child is allowed to own her experience, she can socially adapt on a different ground than in the opposite case (Rogers, 1959). She can learn to adjust according to her own choice, learning the consequences of her behaviour rather than adjusting her behaviour according to an external evaluation determining whether she is loveable or not. In such a case, inner conflict and tension are not likely to arise in the child (Rogers, 1959).

In the opposite case, if the response is a non-accepting attitude towards her entire being when she hits her little sister, she eventually learns to integrate a distorted experience into her self-concept (Kvalsund, 2003a, Rogers, 1959). The self-concept takes on a dualistic form: the primary experience, that of feeling loveable even whilst being angry and hitting her sister, is replaced by a “secondary experience”, which is eventually perceived as genuine, primary and real (Kvalsund, 2003a). The child internalises the non-accepting attitude of her parent towards the mere feeling of anger and loses contact with the primary experience, which is replaced by a secondary experience, for instance, the feeling of wanting to cry. As an adult, the woman might believe that she is never angry: she is not an angry person. According to Rogers (1959), “*an experience may be perceived as organismically satisfying, when in fact this is not true*” (p. 210). In other words, the person has come to believe that what she experiences, for instance the impulse to cry, is actually her primary experience. Although she believes, on a cognitive level that this is her primary experience, her organismic valuing process is different. For example, the anger is still present in her organism, but symbolized in an inaccurate manner (Kvalsund, 2003a).

In this way, she has found acceptance from her parents and thus found herself acceptable and loveable, all coming from the imposed introjection from her parents that led to the condition of worth. However, along the way she has lost contact with and stopped trusting her organismic valuing process (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). The child learns that her primary experience is not trustworthy, but must be replaced by other, more adequate and acceptable responses. Her primary experience is proved less trustworthy than the external evaluation. Ultimately, such a process impairs the individual’s ability to trust herself (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004; Thorne, 1991). She continuously looks outside herself for confirmation and acceptance. Due to this, she might experience a feeling of tension between the person she wishes to be and the person she has been taught to be and thus feels that she should be. She lives in

a gap between the idealised response, for instance the expression of crying, and the real response, the anger.¹⁵ The voice of her parents has eventually become her own.

Such early childhood experiences might create tensions in the individual that eventually lead her to seek therapy (Rogers, 1959). The aim of the therapy is to help the client restore her ability to trust her organismic valuing process and value the wholeness of her being, regardless the responses of others. The therapist seeks to help the client “*restore a lost relationship (...) the client’s relationship to himself*” (Kvalsund, 2003a, p. 10). By helping the client re-establish the “inner locus of evaluation” (Rogers, 1959), which was in a sense lost in her childhood, the therapist helps the client to become more self-directed and less dependent on the evaluation of others. The focus on early childhood experiences as formative for the development of the self might resemble Freud’s psychoanalytical theory to some degree (Ivey et al., 2012). However, contrary to the psychoanalytic theory as expressed by Freud, Rogerian theory is optimistic when it comes to the client’s capacity to change the experiential and behavioural patterns which have emerged from these early experiences (Ivey et al., 2012).

On the other hand, if the response to the child is an accepting attitude, she is likely to develop an accepting attitude towards the wholeness of herself as a human being, and at the same time, an accepting attitude towards others (Rogers, 1959; Kvalsund, 2003a). She learns to listen to and trust her own organismic response, while at the same time she is given a choice as to how she wants to express and symbolise this feeling through her actions in the world. She can choose to hit her sister, scream, cry, talk and execute whatever other action, none of which make her a bad or unlovable person. Eventually she learns to discriminate adequate actions from less adequate ones, not because they make her less loveable and acceptable, but because she empathically understands that they make others hurt, annoyed, indignant and so forth. According to Rogers (1959), “*The individual, in effect, becomes his own significant social other*” (p. 209). She can “own” her anger, and choose to cope with it in more and more socially adequate ways (Kvalsund, 2003a). This implies that she has been enabled to identify and attend to her own needs, as well as being attentive to the needs of people around her. An adequate process of adjustment might unfold

¹⁵ The concepts “real self” and “ideal self” are crucial components in Rogerian theory (Ivey et al., 2012; Kvalsund, 2003a) but will not be specifically addressed in this thesis.

without distortion of the primary experience as expressed in the organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1959; Kvalsund, 2003a). Self-actualisation is, in other words, believed to go hand in hand with altruism (Kvalsund, 2003a).

2.3.2. Self-actualisation and altruism

Kvalsund (2003a) argues that true altruism: doing good to others or acting on behalf of a common good must involve a certain element of egotism. When altruism is anchored in externally imposed moralities or norms to which the individual does not deeply attune and adhere, the emergent actions are “pseudo-actions”. For instance, if the child who is about to hit her little sister stops her action, motivated by the fear of punishment or of not feeling loveable and worthy of her parent’s care, she will still feel the incongruence of not accepting her primary experience: the anger which motivates the action of hitting. On the contrary, if she can expand herself to contain and embrace both the egoistical motive, the drive towards self-actualisation and the altruistic motive, that of wanting to do good to her little sister, this can then be characterised as an inner altruistic motive that both entails self-actualisation, on the one hand, and respect for the other’s right to be accepted, on the other hand (Kvalsund, 2003a).

In the following, the idea of a continuum rather than a dichotomy in relation to the process of self-actualisation will be discussed.

2.3.3. Either-or, or both-and?

Rogers (1959) maintains that the process of self-actualisation, which is in accordance with the organismic evaluation, is “*hypothetically possible, and hence important theoretically*” but that it “*does not appear to occur in actuality*” (p. 224). For instance, a parent who rushes to get her children to the day-care centre before getting to work in the morning might be harsher and less accepting towards her children than she wishes to be because she feels stressed. The theory of self-actualisation as promoted by the organismic valuing process might appear as black and white, it might seem as though one is either completely self-actualised and self-directed or that one is totally other-dependent. Rogers (1961/2004) refers to the “fully functioning” person as a “hypothetical” person. Rather than speaking in dichotomic “either-or” terms, it therefore seems plausible to imagine a continuum in which the person might feel

more or less in accordance with her organismic valuing process in different situations and contexts in her life.

The point made by Rogers (1959), however, seems to be that an adult might experience a psychological tension and disturbance in her life as a result of early childhood experiences, but when responses to her are acceptance and an “unconditional positive regard” she is likely to become better able to trust her self-actualising tendency as manifested by the organismic valuing process. If such an accepting attitude is communicated by a teacher, friend, spouse, colleague, leader, therapist or coach, for instance, the person might become better able to trust herself and in this way discover her resources and abilities to deal with the tasks and challenges in her life.

The preceding outline has established the background for understanding the importance of the accepting attitude of the therapist, which will, in the following, also be argued as a crucial quality of the coach, as understood from an existential-humanistic perspective.

2.4. Acceptance

A key part of the coaching process is to create a space in which coachees might feel “*understood, valued, and accepted for who they are*” (Joseph, 2006, p. 48). One of the conditions¹⁶ that Rogerian theory considers to be crucial to therapeutic growth and development is that the therapist shows the client a non-judgemental, accepting attitude: an “unconditional positive regard” (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004, 1980/1995). The client is by virtue of being human worthy of acceptance, respect, love and care. Irrespective of what feelings the client expresses, the therapist must show an accepting attitude towards these feelings for the client to start accepting her own feelings. As in the illustrated case with the child who is taught not to be angry, she has lost the ability to accept and love herself as a whole human being and rather gives herself a selective and conditional love and acceptance (Rogers, 1959). Only when she expresses acceptable feelings is she worthy of being loved and accepted, not only by others, but also by herself.

If the client is to start believing in her ability to make positive choices in the world while still being true and attentive to her inner locus of evaluation (Kvalsund,

¹⁶ These three conditions are acceptance/unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness/congruence (Rogers, 1961/2004, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). Other terms have also been used in describing these conditions.

2003a; Rogers, 1959), the therapist must communicate to the client that she is, by virtue of being a person, unconditionally loveable and acceptable (Rogers, 1961/2004). For the client to start accepting and loving herself, the therapist must accept her entire being with its full range of incompatible feelings, paradoxes and challenges. The paradoxical theory of change proposes that only when one starts to accept whatever *is*, does the possibility of adaptable change emerge (Beisser, 1970).

However, showing unconditional acceptance is not necessarily easy in all situations. An extreme example of this is if a client expresses the inclination to kill someone, the therapist might feel the responsibility to prevent her from putting this inclination into action, and thus responds with the words: *“but that’s wrong - you can’t do that!”* The problem with such a response might be that the client learns that she cannot express whatever feeling that emerge within her to the therapist, and she starts to suppress her feelings in the therapeutic encounter. This might obstruct the openness and trust required if the client is to explore himself in the therapeutic relationship. Alternatively, the therapist might encourage the client to start exploring the feeling of wanting to kill someone, for instance, by asking: *“What is it like to be you and wanting to kill someone?” “How does it feel?” “What does this feeling do to you?”*

Rogers (1959, 1961/2004, 1980/1995) does not suggest, however, that all sorts of *actions* should be addressed with acceptance. The therapist can express her values relating to the act of killing someone, but at the same time communicate to the client that no feeling is too shameful, dangerous or prohibited to share and explore in the therapeutic encounter. The therapeutic space in which the client is fully accepted and free to explore the whole range of feelings within herself might be her only possibility of exploring such feelings. One fundamental idea is that when a feeling is accepted as a part of one’s whole being, this feeling is likely to give rise to new feelings (Gendlin, 1962/1997).

Showing the client an unconditional positive regard implies discriminating between the person and her actions – between emotions and their manifestations in the world (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). In the case of the client who wants to kill someone, the therapist is not encouraged to express acceptance towards the act of killing, but she can nonetheless show acceptance towards the *feeling* of wanting to kill someone. Moreover, the therapist might help the client to explore the consequence of

killing someone. By showing the initial acceptance towards the feeling of wanting to kill someone, the strength of this feeling might decrease as the client discovers, for instance, that it originates from a feeling of not being accepted by the person she wants to kill.

2.4.1. Acceptance in the coaching encounter

Transferred to the coaching context, showing the coachee an accepting attitude, an unconditional, positive regard (Rogers, 1961/2004), is considered crucial if the coachee is to accept the wholeness of her being, which is seen as a prerequisite for growth and development, as understood from an existential-humanistic point of view (Kvalsund, 2005a). In this way, a trusting relationship can be created in which the coachee feels free to explore and express the variety of emotions, cognitions and bodily responses that are present at any given moment (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014), as manifested by the organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1959).

For instance, if the coachee feels angry with her colleague, she can symbolise the anger accurately in the encounter with the coach, that is, express anger through words by stating that she feels angry, and through body language, such as clenching her fists or blushing. Similarly, she might symbolise her anxiety in facing a specific task accurately by expressing in words that she feels anxious or communicating to the coach a feeling of an increased heartbeat. If the coach communicates through her approach in the encounter that it is acceptable to feel anxious or angry, and that the coachee is still worthy of respect, love and care, the coach contributes to creating a climate in which the coachee feels free to share whatever is present in her experience, and she is unconditionally positively regarded and accepted by the coach (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Rogers, 1959). If, on the other hand, the coachee feels that the coach communicates, for instance through her facial expressions, that she thinks the coachee is weak because she is anxious, or immature because she feels anger, the coachee might experience conditions of worth in the encounter with the coach, and then also reject her own experience as unworthy and unacceptable (Rogers, 1959). To encourage the coachee to have a more self-directed way of being in the world, it is argued that acceptance is the starting point (Rogers, 1961/2004).

2.4.2. Encouraging the self-directedness of the coachee

As shown above, the paradoxical theory of change (Beisser, 1970) suggests that acceptance of experience is the point from which a process of change might emerge. In Rogerian theory, this principle is related to the belief in the individual's tendency of self-actualisation (Rogers, 1959; 1961/2004). If the coachee allows the organismic valuing process to unfold in terms of accepting the experience that at any given moment is before her, she will ultimately be able to solve her problems herself. Turning back to the above example with the coachee who feels anger or anxiety: If the coach encourages the coachee to further explore the communicated experience rather than judging or evaluating it, it is believed that the coachee will discover more of her own resources to solve her challenges. For instance, if the coach asks, "*what is it like for you to feel anxious?*" the coachee is encouraged to explore the anxiety at a deeper, more existential level than merely in relation to the specific task in question. This might entail discoveries that will help the coachee to understand more of her anxiety and, according to this understanding, she will be better able to face the present challenge and any similar challenges in the future.

This process rests on the assumption that when the coachee becomes the agent taking charge of her process the potential change will be more thorough, radical, fundamental and sustainable than if the interventions of the coach were based on the coach's own standards, norms and judgements (Nelson, 2014, p.584). The purpose is to enhance the coachee's self-understanding and self-insight in such a way that she is enabled to find out which choices to make and what actions to take (Kvalsund, 2005a; Alrø & Keller, 2011). Through such an attitude, the coach shows a fundamental belief that the coachee herself has the resources needed to find out what is right for her, and that by establishing contact with these resources, adaptations, solutions and answers can be found by the coachee herself.

If, on the other hand, the coach makes suggestions for solutions to the challenge in question, and asks, for instance: "*Have you tried to ask your leader to give you other tasks?*" this might contribute to solving the specific task. However, it might foster dependency and other-directedness in the relationship; the coachee does not necessarily become better able to solve future challenges of the same kind, but might become more dependent on the input from the coach. The responses of the coach should not stem from her own evaluations or standards of what is acceptable

or adequate, but rather, the responses should be probed according to the experience of the coachee, who is the frame of reference, the “highest authority” (Rogers, 1961/2004).

2.4.2.1. The non-directive coach and the self-directed coachee

Stimulating and nurturing the self-directedness of the coachee implies a non-directive approach to the coachee (Joseph, 2014; Nelson, Cushion, Potrac, & Groom, 2014).¹⁷ This means that the coach does not see her task as giving advice or providing solutions to the coachee, but rather helping the coachee to raise and expand her awareness (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014), and in this way discover her own solutions and answers. The assumption promoted in the introduction, that the coachee is inherently “*resourceful, creative, and whole*” (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 2009, p. 3) and capable of finding the solutions to her challenges, implies that the expertise of the coach lies in her facilitative competence rather than in her knowledge about the professional area of the coachee (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2005a; Whitmore, 2011).

Rogers’ theory was initially called “*non-directive counselling and therapy*” (Rogers, 1942), and in this first phase of his theoretical development the principle of non-directivity was emphasised to the extent that the verbal interventions of the counsellor were almost exclusively about reflecting back what the client said so she could deepen her understanding and raise her awareness of her experience (Ivey et al., 2012). Joseph (2014) claims that “*non-directivity does not mean that there is no direction*” (pp. 67-68). Rather, the direction is found by the coachee herself with the help of the facilitative competence of the coach. This does not mean that the coach cannot also have competence related to the issue in question, or, for instance, the work context of the coachee, but rather this kind of competence is not a figure in the coaching encounter. An unalterable belief in the coachee’s own resources and opportunities to impel her own growth and development urges the coach to shift the focus back to the coachee and arrange for her process of establishing contact with her

¹⁷ As mentioned above, Rogers changed the name of his theory from “non-directive”, via “client-centred” to “person-centred” (Ivey et al., 2012). To a certain degree, these shifts implied a gradually more active therapist, in the sense that she would communicate interpretations, although always checking their relevance with the coachee (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991) and ask more questions (Ivey et al., 2012). However, the principle of non-directiveness was maintained by Rogers throughout his career, in the sense that he never rejected the principles of self-actualisation and the unconditional positive regard (Ivey et al., 2012).

own competence and expertise with respect to issues in her life (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011), whether these issues are related to the work context or other areas of life.

However, maintaining non-directivity might be challenging, especially when the coachee wishes, more or less explicitly, to uphold the dependency of others, the outer locus of control, and the other-directedness (Schein, 2009). For instance, if the coach feels that the coachee expects that the coach should understand the situation better than the coachee due to her competence and expertise, and thus should be able to provide solutions for the coachee, the belief in the self-directedness of the coachee might be difficult to maintain (Schein, 2009).

In such a case, there might be ambiguity as to the basic conditions of the process as it could be that the principle of self-directedness has not been communicated and agreed upon by both parties in the relationship from the outset. However, even in a case where the principle of self-directedness is an agreed-upon term of the coaching endeavour, it might be difficult for the coach to respond to a question, for example like: *“What do you think, from your experience and expertise, that I should do?”* by saying: *“I really don’t know because I can’t know what is right for you, but let me bounce the question back to you: what do you think, yourself, would be the best thing to do?”* When the coach repeats the question so the coachee can explore the issue herself, in a sense it involves admitting that she is not an expert in the meaning that the coachee wants the coach to be the expert. This might be painful as it involves the fear of losing the respect and trust of the coachee. The issue of dependency will be further developed below. In the following, the notion of actualising human potential will be explored.

2.4.3. Actualising human potential

The idea of striving to reach one’s fullest potential is at the heart of Rogerian theory (Kvalsund, 2003a; Thorne & Sanders, 2013). However, realising one’s potential does not necessarily mean becoming the best performer of a specific task, for example. This is not about competing with others, on the contrary, an important task in existential-humanistic coaching is to help the coachee pay less attention to external standards of performance or norms of being, and direct the focus inwards to what one really wants or to whom one truly feels like being (Rogers, 1959). The purpose of the coaching endeavour is therefore to help the coachee establish contact with her

resources (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008) and help her explore her lived experience (Spinelli & Horner, 2008).

In a Rogerian perspective, if the coachee is not in touch with her inner locus of evaluation (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959), her goals might not be in congruence with her real self and therefore incongruent with what she really wants and who she truly is or feels like being (Gendlin, 1962/1997). Hence, in an existential-humanistic perspective, working to increase performance is inherently linked to the process of facilitating personal development (Kvalsund, 2005a). In the existential-humanistic understanding of coaching, the focus is to help the coachee establish contact with the self-actualising tendency of growth and development in such a way that she is enabled to make meaningful choices and develop in a meaningful direction (Joseph, 2014), whether the issues addressed are related to the work context or life as a whole.

All in all, acceptance is regarded as a crucial quality of the coach that helps the coachee to establish contact with her process of self-actualisation (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). However, to have the ability to communicate with an unconditionally positive consideration of the client and an accepting attitude towards every expression of experience that emerges in the coaching encounter, the coach must also be capable of showing an accepting attitude towards herself, that is, being in touch with and accepting her own flow of experiencing (Gendlin, 1962/1997) in the encounter with the coachee. This is the core idea of congruence, which will be further explored below.

2.5. Congruence

Congruence has been defined as the helper's ability to be "*properly in touch with the complexity of feelings, thoughts and attitudes which will be flowing through them as they seek to track their clients' thoughts and feelings*" (Thorne, 1991, p. 39). This implies an idea of helpers as persons-in-relation (Macmurray, 1961/1999) to the helpee rather than distanced professionals "*intent on concealing themselves behind a metaphorical white coat*" (Thorne, 1991, p. 39). Although dichotomized and extreme, this quote illustrates how radical Rogerian theory is, and particularly as it was for his contemporary time (Ivey et al., 2012). Introducing the helper as a person in relation to the helpee, and emphasising the helper's experience as an important part of the helping process represented a radical shift in the thinking on counselling and therapy (Ivey et al., 2012).

The helper's experience is not the focus of the conversation, but it is a part of the experiential field in the helping encounter, and through this it becomes an important factor in the helping endeavour (Kvalsund, 2003a). Being congruent essentially means being true to one's own experience and being able to face and meet the complexity of feelings, thoughts and responses that arise within oneself in the encounter with the helpee (Rogers, 1961/2004, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). For instance, the helpee might talk about issues that provoke recognition and resonance with the helper's own experience. Being able to know and understand what is going on within herself whilst at the same time being able to be fully attentive to the helpee is the balancing act referred to as congruence. Congruence does not imply that the helper shares all her responses and reactions in the meeting with the helpee. On the contrary, it involves being able to determine when such communication of one's own experience might contribute to enhancing the process of the helpee (Thorne, 1991).

Congruence is regarded as a key factor in the coaching relationship (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008) in terms of the coach being aware of and attentive to her own experience in the encounter with the coachee, and being able to communicate some of her experience when this is believed to be relevant to the process. For the coach, congruence involves being aware that she is inevitably a part of the experiential field (Kvalsund, 2003b) of the coachee (Allan & Whybrow, 2008), inasmuch as the coachee is a part of her experiential field.

One aspect of congruence is the coach's ability to express her vulnerability and shortcomings in the relationship with the coachee. Referring to Jones (2006), Nelson et al. (2014) argue that coaching might become a kind of "face work" and "impression management" in which the coach appears as a "*confident and knowledgeable expert 'front' to acquire and maintain social acceptance (i.e. trust and respect) while endeavouring to hide any fears and anxieties that expose a dysfluent coach*" (p. 520, authors' quotation marks and parenthesis). Such an attitude is contradictive to the Rogerian principle of congruence (Rogers, 1961/2004; 1980/1995). What made Rogers' theory radical was precisely his focus on, to put it metaphorically, pulling the therapist down from the expert's pedestal and allowing the therapist and the client to be two persons in the relationship (Ivey et al., 2012).

Falk (2010) argues that "*when you as the helper do not know what to say or do, that is exactly what you should say or do*" (p. 20, my translation). Although it might be painful to reveal your vulnerability, as argued in relation to the above

example of the coachee who demands an expert answer, by explicitly denying this demand and returning the question to the coachee, such an approach is believed to emphasise the mutuality of the coaching endeavour (Kvalsund, 2005a), which is the key to a more self-directed coachee (Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). When the coach insists on the coachee's power and capability to resolve her own challenges, this is believed to enhance this capability (Rogers, 1959).

The importance of being in touch with, accepting and communicating one's experience is thus emphasised on both sides of the relationship, on the part of the coach and the coachee (Kvalsund, 2005a). The concept of experience will be further explored below.

2.6. Experience

The exploration of the coachee's experience is at the heart of the coaching process, as understood from an existential-humanistic perspective (Bluckert, 2014; Joseph, 2014; Nelson et al., 2014; Stelter, 2008). This involves a pragmatic understanding of learning and development (Kvalsund, 2015b) in that the experience of the coachee is regarded as the "highest authority" and the "touchstone of validity" (Rogers, 1961/2004). The interventions of the coach are "validated" in relation to the coachee's experience in the "here-and-now" (Hostrup, 1999), rather than in relation to an external frame of reference and evaluation. This contradicts the principles of psychodynamic orientations, for instance, where the therapist is considered the expert of the human psyche who intentionally interprets the actions, dreams and expressed ideas of the client (Ivey et al., 2012). In cognitive and behaviouristic orientations, the cognitions and behavioural patterns of the client are challenged in terms of their relative irrationality or adequacy (Palmer & Szymanska, 2008). In the existential-humanistic understanding, on the other hand, the experience of the client is itself considered the primary source of knowledge, understanding and learning (Kvalsund, 2015b; Rogers, 1961/2004). In the following section, the meaning of exploring experience will be further explored in relation to the coaching context.

2.6.1. Active listening

The main task of the coach as understood from an existential-humanistic perspective is to create a relational environment in which the coachee can explore her lived experience and get in touch with who she truly is, or feels like being (Bluckert, 2014, Gendlin, 1962/1997; Joseph, 2006; 2014; Kvalsund, 2005a). The process of change and development is seen as an inevitable consequence of becoming more aware of who one is at any given moment (Allan & Whybrow, 20008), of being more confident and self-directed (Joseph, 2014; Kvalsund, 2003; Rogers, 1961/2004) and more connected to one's lived experience (Spinelli & Horner, 2008).

Developing the fundamental attitude that is needed to create such an environment is emphasised more than relying on specific techniques (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Spinelli & Horner, 2008). The interventions of the coach are primarily connected to the idea of helping the coachee to raise her awareness, and about exploring her experience in the here-and-now (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). The interventions of the coach are primarily connected to the idea of active listening (Ivey et al., 2012; Joseph, 2014; Kvalsund, 2003a)¹⁸. It is suggested that active listening requires engagement, participation and attention (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008), and involves a range of communicative techniques, such as open and closed questions, encouraging, paraphrasing, self-disclosure, and summarization (Ivey et al., 2012, Ivey, Packard, & Ivey, 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). The aim is to reflect back to the coachee by letting her voice be heard in such a way that whatever she expresses becomes an object for reflection, inquiry and discovery (Kvalsund, 2005). Through this process the coachee might become aware of aspects of her life that she was not previously aware of.

The principle of the non-directivity of the coach is a guiding light in this process (Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008), as argued above. This implies that the coach refrains from telling the coachee what she should be feeling, thinking or experiencing, but rather welcomes any expression of feeling, meaning or experience that emerges in the conversation. The non-judgemental accepting attitude (Rogers, 1961/2004) is a pivotal factor in creating the trusting environment in which she can feel free to explore anything that comes to her mind or anything that she finds challenging or troubling. Joseph (2014) suggests that the slogan “*ask don't tell*”, can

¹⁸ The terms active listening and reflective listening are used interchangeably in this thesis.

be a guiding light in this process, and even more importantly: “*listen, don’t ask*” (p. 72). The mere act of listening to help the coachee clarify and understand her worldview is considered to be a key skill in the coaching encounter (Spinelli & Horner, 2008).

In this instance, taking advantage of the silence that arises in the encounter might be as effective as asking questions or actively listening (Kvalsund, 2006). “Holding” the silence might allow for new experience and insight to arise (Silsbee, 2008). In the above example, where the coach returned the question “*what do you think I should do?*” to the coachee, allowing for the coachee to explore her experience in relation to the issue might call for the coachee’s ability to maintain silence and await new discoveries that might emerge.

In caricatured parodies of the Rogerian “non-directive” approach to the client, the therapist merely repeats parrot-like the last part of the sentence just expressed by the client (Rogers, 1980/1995). In such parodies, the fundamental attitude of the therapist, and the relational climate of trust, acceptance and empathy (Rogers, 1961/2004) in which the client dares to be who she truly is or feels like being are not recognised. The skill of reflective listening cannot be understood as a mere technique, it must be rooted in the coach’s fundamental attitude of acceptance, congruence and empathy (Rogers, 1980/1995; Tyler, 2011). In the following, the concept of feedback will be discussed in relation to existential-humanistic coaching.

2.6.2. Feedback

In an inclusive perspective, feedback might be understood as pervasive in human communication (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). Everything one does or does not do in the encounter with another person might in a sense be understood as feedback. Listening, whether actively or passively, always involves more than merely hearing what the other person says, in the physiological sense: it involves continuous feedback from the listening person. Typical expressions of poor listening, such as not looking at the person who is talking, is feedback to the same degree as active listening where one shows interest and encouragement (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). Active listening, in the form of minimal encouragements, summary, paraphrasing and reflection of feeling and meaning (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006) is all about “feeding back” and communicating interest and respect for the other person (Ivey et al., 1998). In the following, however, the understanding of feedback is limited to a

communicative tool intentionally used to reflect back some of the information expressed by the client in the form of words, actions and body language.

In existential-humanistic coaching, feedback might be used as a coaching technique to the extent that it helps the coachee to understand and relate to her world in more adequate ways according to her own experience. Feedback is thus not given from an expert position in which the coach evaluates or judges the adequacy or rationality of the coachee's actions, assumptions or beliefs (Spinelli & Horner, 2008, p.46). It might, however, be given in the form of reflection of meaning, or reflection of feeling (Ivey et al., 1998; Ivey et al., 2012; Kvalsund, 2006).

This involves an interpretative element in that the coach reflects back possible meanings of the experience as expressed by the coachee. However, it is suggested that such interpretive feedback from the coach must be probed and checked with the coachee so she can experientially relate to and probe the interpretation and suggestion and confirm or disprove its validity in relation to her experience, and in that way take charge of the process (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). The experience of the coachee thus remains the "touchstone of validity" (Rogers, 1961/2004) in the coaching process.

Feedback from the coach is not, as stated above, given from an expert position, but rather from an observer who gives feedback on what she observes in the here-and-now encounter with the coachee (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). In the perspective of person-centred theory, such feedback might be given to help the coachee discover incongruence between body language and verbal expressions (Ivey et al., 2012). For instance, if a coachee describes her relationship with a colleague and expresses that they have an "okay" relationship, while at the same time clenching her fists, the coach might reflect this observed incongruence back to the coachee so she can explore what it might mean to her. The pivotal factors in such a situation are the willingness of the coach to openly check what this means to the coachee (Kvalsund, 2005a; Rogers, 1980; Thorne, 1991), and her acceptance of any answer from the coachee.

For instance, if the coachee experiences incongruence but is not willing to reveal that she might be angry with her colleague, the relational environment created in the space between the two might not be accepting and trusting enough for her to risk sharing her feelings. In such a case, a coach who imposes her interpretation might do more damage to the relationship between the two than being helpful for the

coachee. However rejected the coach might feel by her interpretation being invalidated, she must not lose sight of the purpose of the coaching process: being of help to the coachee, on her terms (Falk, 2010; Schein, 2009). In the following, phenomenology will be explored as a method in coaching.

2.6.3. Phenomenological concepts in coaching

A phenomenological approach is suggested as an intervention to facilitate the exploration of the experience of the coachee (Kvalsund, 2005a; Spinelli & Horner, 2008, Stelter, 2008). Phenomenological principles, as they apply to the research process, will be thoroughly explained in Chapter 4, but are briefly presented in the following to illustrate the pervasiveness of the phenomenological approach in this project. By using the phenomenological reduction, the coach facilitates the coachee's process of suspending the "taken-for-grantedness" of her experience in such a way that she can establish contact with her experience as it is, rather than as she wishes it to be. For instance, the coach might contribute to creating a relational climate in which the coachee can explore her "primary experience" rather than being subject to her "secondary experience" (Kvalsund, 2003a).

As an example, Kvalsund (2005a) suggests that if a coachee expresses that he feels nothing, through the phenomenological reduction, this "nothingness" can be made an object of consciousness, a phenomenon that might be explored so the coachee can expand her insight and understanding of herself. It is suggested that the phenomenological reduction has a counterintuitive nature and that it requires careful practice to teach the organism to let experience come to the fore "as it is" (Depraz, Varela, & Vermersch, 2003; Kvalsund, 2005a).

The task of the coach is, in this perspective, to help the coachee explore the phenomenon as it is experienced in the here-and-now, rather than as a mere cognitive object (Kvalsund, 2005a). As expressed by Allan and Whybrow (2008): "*There may be more emphasis on "what is going on right now", rather than "what happened there and then"*" (p. 134, authors' brackets). The coachee is challenged to move from a withdrawn, reflective mode and into the immediate experiential field (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). From talking *about*, for instance, one's anger in habitual terms: "*I always feel angry while talking with my mother*", the coach might challenge the coachee to explore the anger experientially by asking, for instance, "*can you be in contact with the feeling of anger right now?*" Through such a shift, the

coachee is challenged to explore her anger in the moment-to-moment encounter with the coachee, in the here-and-now, and the coachee might thus gain valuable insight about what this anger is about, not by merely reflecting and cognitively theorising, but rather by establishing contact with the anger through experiential exploration (Kvalsund, 2005a).

As mentioned in the introduction to the existential-humanistic perspective in the beginning of this chapter, gestalt principles and hermeneutical phenomenology are closely related in terms of the basic assumption of interpretation as an inherent part of human existence. Gestalt principles will be elaborated on in the following, with a focus on the concepts of awareness, figure and ground.

2.6.4. Awareness

In a gestalt perspective, the coaching endeavour is based on the idea that any change and development starts with awareness, becoming aware of who we are at any given moment (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2008). As mentioned above, the “paradoxical theory of change” (Beisser, 1970) suggests that change can occur only when we experience contact with “what is” (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2008). According to Allan and Whybrow, coaching is, in this perspective, about “*becoming fully aware and then turning that awareness into action*” (p. 133). The humanistic principle of self-actualisation can be found in the idea of “creative adjustment” – people always do their best, in any context, to meet their needs. In this perspective, even maladaptive behaviour might be understood as positive and meaningful with given conditions (Bluckert, 2014). The role of the coach is, however, to help the coachee to become aware of her habitual strategies to meet her needs and through this help her to develop more meaningful ways of relating to people in her life (Bluckert, 2008).

The existential claim that “*as individuals we are responsible for our decisions and actions, or indecisions and inactions*” (Allan & Whybrow, 2008, p. 137) is central to gestalt theory. By becoming aware of our own needs, and being enabled to express these needs, our “response-ability” is increased: we are better able to take charge of our lives and we move from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control (Perls, 1969).

The moment we become aware of and accept our experience in the “here-and-now”, the experience is likely to change, we establish contact with our flow of

experience, our experiencing the felt sense of our inner world (1962/1997). Emotions, thoughts and reactions that are not accepted, on the other hand, tend to obstruct our ability to change and move on with our lives. Awareness is considered to be the foundation of gestalt; it is the goal and the method (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). By becoming aware, coachees are enabled to engage with and better understand their lived experience *“in such a way that they are able to generate and carry forward what they want to be doing in a beneficial and satisfying manner”* (Allan & Whybrow, 2008, p. 143). In the following, the idea of figure and ground will be outlined.

2.6.4.1. Figure and ground

The German word *gestalt* means pattern, form or configuration (Bluckert, 2014). In the image of the young/old woman (see figure B in Appendix A) we can see a young woman who turns her head away so that we can only see her profile, and changing our perspective, we can see an old crone. In the same way as the image of the vase referred to earlier in this chapter (see figure A in Appendix A), this is a common example of how we see different things in different situations, people, places and so on (Ivey et al., 2012). According to Allan and Whybrow (2008): *“(...) what we see and how we perceive things is not an objective reality but the result of who we are at one moment in time”* (p. 135).

Gestalt theory draws on hermeneutic thinking, asserting that we understand the parts in light of our perception of the whole, and the other way around, our understanding of the whole determines how we perceive the parts (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951). For instance, when a colleague says something, we understand the expressed words in light of our perception of and relationship to the whole person. This human tendency is our prerequisite for understanding, without which we would not be able to create meaning in our world (Gadamer, 1960/2013). However, the meaning we create does not always help us relate to the world in adequate ways. For instance, if an overall perception of my colleague is that he does not like me, I might interpret anything he says to me in light of this understanding, and even a compliment given with the best of intentions, like: *“you did really well today”*, could be interpreted as an expression of sarcasm, for instance. In such a case, raising awareness about our ways of relating to people and situations might be a first and crucial step in relating more adequately to the world. By becoming aware of and challenging our

pre-understanding, we are given a wider range of choices and action possibilities (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Kvalsund, 2005a).

In coaching understood from an existential-humanistic perspective, principles from gestalt and phenomenology add to person-centred theory's focus on active listening, all having the purpose of exploring experience as the primary source of knowledge and understanding. In the following section, the meaning of the personal dimension of the coaching relationship will be discussed.

2.7. The coach as a person-in-relation

In existential-humanistic coaching, the relationship between the coach and the coachee becomes an arena of experiential learning in itself (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Kvalsund, 2005a). According to Allan & Whybrow (2008), "*It is the coaching relationship that is the major 'tool'*" (p. 144, authors' brackets). Gestalt coaching draws on field theory, emanating from the ideas of Kurt Lewin (1951), suggesting that all behaviour can be understood in relation to the field, the system and the context in which it operates (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014). As such, the primary field in which the coachee acts, thinks, feels and experiences is the relationship with the coach in the here-and-now of the coaching encounter. Thus, the coach cannot be a neutral part in the process of the coachee, she "*cannot not be in the field*" (Allan & Whybrow, 2008, p. 137, authors' emphasis).

The coach is fully engaged as a person in the coaching relationship and is thus a part of the coachee's context, and vice versa (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). In this perspective, the experience of the coach is as present in the encounter as the experience of the coachee. Rather than determining the coach's experience as private and external to the coaching endeavour, the experiential field becomes a shared space in which the relationship itself comes to the fore as a crucial part of the process, as argued in the section on congruence above. It is suggested that in a genuine, authentic relationship where both the coach and the coachee become persons in relation to each other, in the sense that the idea of *one professional helping another in need of help* is transcended, this relationship itself becomes an arena in which the coachee can explore her experience in the here-and-now, and thus develop a "healthier" world-view (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). This does not imply that the coach uses her expertise to teach the coachee what a healthy world-view is, but rather that the relationship between the two becomes a resource in the coaching endeavour in terms of being an

arena for probing ways of relating (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014; Kvalsund, 2005a; Spinelli & Horner, 2008). The idea of the coach as a person-in-relation to the coachee will be further elaborated in the following, through the concept of mutuality.

2.8. Mutuality

The ideal of mutuality and reciprocity in coaching involves the aim of distribution of power, which is implied in recognising the coachee as the expert on her life (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2005a). However, paradoxically as it might seem, it is suggested that a helping relationship is inherently asymmetrical (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Alrø & Nilles, 2015; Schein, 2009; Skau, 2013). The moment one person asks another for help, this person is submissive by virtue of the helping request (Schein, 2009). For instance, questions might arise as to: *Will this person help me in such a way that I do not feel belittled or stupid?* It is proposed that if the helper is to strive to restore this relational imbalance, then searching for mutuality in the relationship is an ethical imperative in the helping process (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Falk, 2010).

In spite of this asymmetrical outset, mutuality might be recognised in an early phase of the helping relationship when it comes to the two parties acknowledging the helpee's need for help (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2009), and the belief that the helper is able to provide the help needed. Furthermore, mutuality might be regarded as a gradual process in terms of the helper's genuine wish to create "helpful help" (Schein, 2009) in such a way that the helpee eventually is enabled to help herself.

It is suggested that the dynamic of the helping relationship is characterised by the relational qualities of dependence, independence and interdependence (Kvalsund, 1998, 2005a; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2003, 2008, 2009). The first phase of the helping relationship is often characterised by dependency, however, when this dependency is recognised, mutuality might exist in terms of the mutual acceptance of the need for help (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2009) and the genuine wish to address this need in a respectful, ethical way (Anderson & Handelsman, 2010). From this perspective, the task of the helper is to help the helpee to explore and experience her independence, and through this stage the helper and the helpee might eventually experience interdependence, which is a more mature form of mutuality. The concepts of dependence, independence and interdependence are presented and discussed in

relation to coaching below. These terms emanate from the theory of John Macmurray (1961/1999), whose thinking will be briefly introduced in the following.

2.8.1. The relation as a prerequisite for the person

The theory of persons-in-relation (Macmurray, 1961/1999) takes its point of departure in the assumption that the human being is inherently relational and suggests that it is the relation to the “other” that determines the notion of self (Kvalsund, 1998).

Macmurray’s theory arose from what he called “the crisis of the personal” (Godway, 2010). He criticised the prevailing scientific paradigm of his time for not recognising the field of the person: “(...) *scientific method is based on the assumption that things are what they appear to be; that their behaviour necessarily expresses their nature*” (Macmurray, 1961/1999, p. 169). As mentioned above, this paradigm involves a view of the human being emanating from the Cartesian split between mind and body, in which the thinking subject is regarded separately from and superior to the body and the world (Godway, 2010; Kvalsund, 1998). From this perspective, the thinking subject remains a “solus ipse”, a closed system in which I can only know myself, and you can only know yourself (Kvalsund, 1998). In such a worldview, there is no possibility of contact or knowing the “other”.

However, the individual acts and behaves in self-determining ways that cannot be externally controlled or explained, but rather need to be understood (Kvalsund, 1998). In the personal field, we are dependent on each other’s will and ability to express ourselves if we are to know each other. We can know objective facts about a person, such as where she lives, whom she lives with, what she does for a living and even how much she earns her living. However, these facts do not reveal anything about what is going on inside her: who she *really is* (Kvalsund, 1998). According to Macmurray (1961/1999), “*if you refuse to reveal yourself to me, I cannot know you*” (p. 169).

In discussing power aspects of the helping relationship, Allgood and Kvalsund (2003) distinguish between internal and external relations and maintains that power is funnelled through external and internal channels. The external relation refers to the external structure of the relationship, for instance, when a coachee and a coach engage in a helping process, the external relation is the observable structure of the relationship: two people meet, apparently the one in need of help from the other, and the other with the intention to help. However, it is argued that “*the external relation*

alone is a necessary and negative condition for the helping relation” (Kvalsund, 2003b, p. 8).¹⁹ Without establishing an internal relationship where real contact and personal engagement can arise, the helping relationship remains an external relationship in which *“we are left with skin and shadows”* (Kvalsund, 2003b, p. 7).

In the internal relationship, that is the shared phenomenal field of the people involved, the two interacting persons reveal themselves to each other and are involved in a personal field in which the possibility of interdependency is immanent (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003). Whereas elements of dependence and independence are manifested in all sorts of relationships between interacting people, the interdependent relational quality can only assert itself in relationships in which two persons have risked becoming persons-in-relation, transcending both dependence and independence (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). In the following, interdependence is presented as a way of understanding the concept of mutuality.

2.8.2. Dependence and independence

Dependence, independence and interdependence might be understood in terms of development phases in the individual’s life, as well as dynamically changing dimensions of any human relationship (Kvalsund, 1998). The following account starts by showing the developmental aspects of this theory, and then shows how these ideas are actualised in the coaching context.

Dependence is characteristic of the first phase of an individual’s life (Macmurray, 1961/1999). The infant completely depends on the significant other, the primary caregiver, without whom she cannot survive (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). Animals show an inherent directionality (Kvalsund, 1998), such as when the bird learns to fly and feed itself even if left alone without its parent. In the case of the human being, on the contrary, the relatedness to the other is a prerequisite for personhood: *“Someone must think, feel and act as a person for the infant’s personhood to emerge”* (Kvalsund, 1998, p. 40). When the infant cries, the caregiver considers the need as objectively as possible and acts for the child to satisfy her need. The parent asks herself: Is she hungry? Is she in pain? Is she cold? She then responds

¹⁹ The book I am referring to here is organised as a dialogue between Eleanor Allgood and Ragnvald Kvalsund, in which Allgood responds to Kvalsund’s reflections on specific themes. Since the authors have written separate sections, I have chosen to present the text as an edited book in the reference list, with the two authors as editors. However, it seems to be against the dialogic spirit of the book not to refer to it as a whole, and I have therefore chosen to do this when the book is generally referred to in my text. However, in the case of direct quotes, I have chosen to refer to the author who has written the section in question, which is then presented as a book section in the reference list.

as adequately as she can, by feeding, comforting, lulling or wrapping the infant in a blanket. The infant completely depends upon the parent's ability to assume her perspective and do everything in her power to meet her needs. The parent responds to the needs of the infant as if they were her own to the extent that she represses her own organismic needs, such as the need for sleep (Kvalsund, 1998).

The developmental task succeeding the state of dependence is an individuation process of transcending to more independent ways of relating (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). For individuality to unfold, the significant other must encourage the child to do what she is now capable of doing for herself. This involves a painful process for the child, whose universe has hitherto been a predictable world in which the experience of someone fulfilling her needs has continuously been confirmed (Macmurray, 1961/1999). For instance, the parent insists that the child goes to sleep without her lulling it. The baby is put to bed, it cries and the parent sits down by the bed but refuses to take the baby in her arms and lull her to sleep. The child experiences a break in the predictability of her world and fights back by crying in an attempt to re-establish the lost predictability. Kvalsund (1998) suggests that the child must eventually give this project up "*in order to become a person*" (p. 46). By becoming more independent of the significant other, specifically, the child will eventually develop the ability to become independent of others in general (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

In the parent-child relationship, the individuation process can be initiated by the parent, as shown above, but it might also be initiated by the child, for example when the little child rages over not being allowed to get dressed herself, or when the adolescent slams the door and locks herself into her room after an argument with her parents. Furthermore, dependence and independence can be experienced as negative or positive (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). For instance, when the infant's needs are met in a timely and appropriate manner by the parent, dependency is experienced as adequate by both parties in the relationship and there is a common "agreement" about upholding the dependency, although not explicitly expressed. When, on the other hand, the adolescent is upset after the argument with her parents, she might feel that her parents maintain dependency in the relationship, which she experiences as negative, whereas the parents might experience negative independency in the relationship, as it is sought by the adolescent. However, positive independence might be realised in the relationship between the two parties

when the young adult moves to her own place and both the parents and “child” approve and appreciate the independence manifested by the moving out.

2.8.2.1. Dependence and independence in the coaching relationship

As shown in section 2.1.2, practitioners of both coaching and therapy identify dependence as a characteristic of therapeutic relationships, whereas coaching is considered to be a more cooperative and equal relationship (Hart et al., 2006). The client seeks the therapist because she is “stuck” in her life and is dependent on help to increase her level of psychological functioning (Hart et al., 2006; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). It has been argued, however, that in Rogerian theory, therapy and coaching do not differ in terms of the practitioner’s way of being in the relationship with the client or coachee (Joseph, 2006, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). The fundamental belief in the individual’s capacity to take charge of her life, and the emphasis on the basic attitude needed to stimulate growth and development in accordance with the individual’s self-actualisation are pervasive ideas in Rogerian theory, whether applied to therapy, education, organisations or international peace work (Ivey et al., 2012; Thorne, 1991; Yalom, 1995).

Nevertheless, it seems that the nature of the coaching relationship is perceived as more cooperative, flexible and partnership-like by practitioners of both therapy and coaching (Hart et al., 2006).²⁰ It is more likely that mutuality is defined as one of the conditions of the process at the outset, in the sense that both parties recognise dependence on each other’s expertise and cooperation (Kvalsund, 2005a). The coach is a supporting facilitator who contributes her process competence, whereas the coachee is an active agent who is prepared to reflect and contribute creatively to the process (Stelter, 2014). However, although mutuality might be an expressed ideal and a basic agreed upon condition of the coaching relationship (Hart et al., 2006; Kvalsund, 2005a), dependence is believed to exist in the relationship insofar as it exists as a relational quality in any other relationship (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

For instance, in the example provided earlier in 2.4.2.1. in which the coachee asks the coach what she thinks she should do, the coachee can be said to promote

²⁰ The theoretical orientation of the practitioners in question is not clarified in this article, and it might thus be questioned whether the perceived difference might have been smaller if the interviewed practitioners had exclusively been inspired by person-centred theory, as argued by Joseph (2006, 2014).

dependence in the relationship. When the coach returns the question, she is insisting on encouraging the coachee's independence. By asking: "*what do you think, yourself that you should do?*", she basically forces the coachee into independency, just like the parent who refuses to do for the child what she believes the child can do for herself in the above example. This might be experienced both positively and negatively. If the coachee takes on the challenge and reflects on her action possibilities, or explores her experience further, and as a result finds a solution, or feels reassured that she will find a solution, the quest for independence might turn out to be positive on both sides of the relationship.

However, if the coachee refuses to take on the challenge, but states, for instance: "*why can't you just give me advice? You must have some experience of this!*", this implies that the coachee is keeping tightly to the dependency of the relationship. The independence the coach is aiming for in this particular situation might be experienced as premature, and thus it becomes negative. However, this could also imply a different kind of independence, paradoxically, the coachee's claim of dependence might be regarded as a demonstration of independence in that she opposes the conditions of the relationship as promoted by the coach. The coach might, on her part, experience dependence as a consequence of the rejection of the coachee: she might feel that the coachee does not approve, respect and value her work, thus she feels dependent on approval, respect and acceptance from the coachee in the particular situation. In this instance, dependence is likely to be experienced as a negative condition.

If interdependence is to be developed in a relationship, it is suggested that both dependence and independence must be transcended (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). This implies that dependence and independence continue to be inherent parts of the relationship because "*to transcend doesn't mean to get rid of what is transcended, rather it means to include it as the negative aspect or motive for the transcendence, and as such, as part of the transcendence itself*" (Kvalsund, 1998, p. 38). The following section illuminates how such transcendence from dependence and independence into interdependence might unfold.

2.8.3. Interdependence

For interdependence to arise in a relationship, positive independence must have been established and then transcended. According to Kvalsund (2005a), *“the possibility of mutuality is recognised in the positive independency”* (p. 110, my translation). When the possibility of positive independence is recognised by both parties in the relationship, a mutual acknowledgement of the other person as an independent individual is established, and from this interdependence might arise (Kvalsund, 1998, 2005). This is the developmental stage, and it tends to develop in adulthood when the “child” and the parent regard each other as individual, independent persons, and can relate to each other in new ways, as persons, rather than merely as parent and child (Kvalsund 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). Interdependence is characterised by a wish, from both parties in the relationship, not to force each other into the state of dependency (Kvalsund, 2005a). It also involves reciprocity, a two-sided mutuality: *“It is not until the relationship is opened and becomes bilateral that one can speak of the possibility of mutuality”* (Kvalsund, 2005a, p. 108). Furthermore, positive independence is considered a necessary, although not sufficient condition for interdependency to occur. However, as argued above, any relationship might relapse into the dependence and independence stage, both within a conversation and in periods of life. Dependence and independence still create an inevitable dimension of the relationship. Before exploring the interdependence dimension further, the dynamic of dependence, independence and interdependence will be explained in terms of the cycle of withdrawal, return and contact (Macmurray, 1961/1999).

2.8.3.1. Contact, withdrawal and return

The rhythm of contact, withdrawal and return is considered a characteristic of the dynamic of any human relationship (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). A metaphor for this dynamic is waves rolling to the shore and breaking before the water withdraws again (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003). When contact is established between two persons, a shared reality emerges, one is offered access to the other’s life-world because there is trust and openness and a willingness to share (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund 1998). Contact is, however, succeeded by withdrawal from the one party or the other. Withdrawal can be understood as a phase in a conversation between two persons, for instance, when the one speaks the other withdraws into a reflective mode (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003). If while in this reflective state the one

person is trying to understand the reality of the other person, the withdrawal is positive. In this case, there is an intentional move towards understanding the phenomenon in question from the point of view of the other person (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003). However, if the withdrawn position does not incorporate the other person, it remains a solipsistic position in which the thinking subject is roaming in her own reality, left only with fantasies about the other person. In such a position, there is no possibility for contact (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

The withdrawal can last for a short moment within a conversation, such as when the one person is considering what the other person just said, but it can also last for a long time. Continuing the wave metaphor, there can be big waves, or small waves. The rhythm of contact, withdrawal and return can, as such, manifest itself in small or large cycles. Withdrawal can be definite, a break in the relationship, if the resistance is dramatic to the extent that there is no possibility for further contact. For instance, when the adult child completely breaks contact with her parents.

Turning back to the dependency developmental phase of the individual, where the infant is completely dependent on the response of the significant other for her existence, the cycle of contact, withdrawal and return proceeds in a more or less frictionless manner: The child cries (return), the parent responds by doing for the child what she cannot do for herself (contact), and the child withdraws to a euphoric state emanating from the fulfilment of her needs (withdrawal) (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray 1961/1999).

However, the moment the significant other intentionally refuses to meet the needs of the child, the relatively harmonious rhythm of contact, withdrawal and return that constituted the predictable world of the infant is broken. Due to the refusal of the other, the child is forced into a withdrawn state filled with confusion, fear, anger and rage, as when the child cries for hours until there is no sound left in her voice, her mother sitting at the side of her bed but refusing to let herself be dominated by the child's will. The child, on the other hand, refuses to submit to the mother's will. However, as shown above, transcendence from the state of dependency to more mature relational qualities, such as independency and ultimately, interdependency, is crucial to become a person (Kvalsund, 1998). This involves a return to the relationship in such a way that contact can be re-established (Macmurray, 1961/1999).

In coaching, the rhythm of contact, withdrawal and return actualises itself as in any other human encounter (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). The one person can withdraw from the conversation into a reflective mode, for instance if the coach asks the coachee: *“What is it like for you to feel stressed?”* The coachee is encouraged to withdraw into reflection and experience. The silence that tends to follow from such a request might be filled with uncertainty by the coach, with her asking herself: *“How did the coachee receive my question? Did she find it stupid? Does it encourage reflection?”* She continuously interprets the silence and looks for signs that might confirm or disprove her interpretation. If she perceives through the body language of the coachee that the coachee is reflecting on and exploring her experience, the coach might again experience contact, although the return has not been confirmed by the coachee’s words. The coachee can return by sharing her experience of feeling stressed and thus confirm the relevance and appropriateness of the question asked by the coach. This confirmation might be experienced as contact: a feeling of sharing, cooperation and co-construction of the process.

If, however, the coachee responds to the question by saying: *“why all these questions about feelings? I’d rather hear you asking about my thoughts and reflections, I don’t feel anything!”* This might represent a greater withdrawal from the relationship in that it might put the entire process and relationship at risk. The coach might feel stupid, useless and rejected, wondering whether the process can continue, and ask herself whether the coachee will return, or whether the withdrawal implies a general doubt in the competence of the coachee, to the extent that the trust is broken and the relationship must come to an end. However, if the coach responds by saying: *“ok, do I understand you right: does this mean that you think I have been asking too much about your feelings during this conversation, or during the process so far, and that you would like me to focus more on your thoughts?”* she invites the coachee to return by further exploring the relationship and process between the two. If the coachee then replies by stating: *“Yeah, that’s right, and honestly, I don’t think this is going to work”*, the coachee might be said to return in terms of sharing her opinion, but in a different sense she is confirming the withdrawal further, to the extent that it might imply a definite break in the relationship between the two (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003, Kvalsund, 2005a).

If, on the other hand, the coachee replies by saying: *“Yes, I simply find it easier to express my thoughts and ideas, I guess I feel something, but at least I’m not*

ready to explore them yet”, she can be seen as returning to the conversation with an invitation to have further contact. She contributes to redefining the basic premise of the process, and in a sense confirms that the coach was not “all wrong” in challenging her, only that she is not ready for this kind of challenge yet. The coach might then feel that her competence is confirmed and the trust is not broken between the two, but rather contact can be re-established and the process might continue, however, in a different direction.

This extensive example shows the complexity of the theory of contact, withdrawal and return, and its lack of absoluteness. Any conversation and relationship might be interpreted in these terms, but the interpretations are brimming with nuances and contradictions. As shown above, what could be interpreted as return could as well be regarded as manifestation of the withdrawal, depending on the perspective. In the following, interdependence will be explored according to the concept of the transformative dialogue.

2.8.3.2. Interdependence as transformative dialogue

Dialogue implies a meeting between two persons who are genuinely interested in each other and participate in each other’s lives (Friedman, 1992; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). This participation is not merely about two people meeting and having a conversation in the objective sense, but rather it involves a more ontological, existential level: the two people meet in a genuine attempt to open up to the life-world of the other so they can influence and let themselves be influenced by each other (Friedman, 1992; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Dialogue is not something that is found in the one person or the other but in the shared space, the “between” that emerges in the interaction (Buber, 1958/2000). In this space, one sees each other as a person rather than an object in terms of the wish to understand, respect and share experience with the other person. In Buberian terminology, this meeting is characterised by an I-Thou attitude rather than an I-It attitude (Buber, 1958/2000).

In a true dialogue, the other person’s “*needs and realities are to be taken into consideration*”, and one is open to and genuinely interested in the other person in her “otherness” (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008, p. 186). One is open to letting oneself be changed and transformed by the other. It is suggested that most so-called dialogues are in reality “I-It” encounters because the underlying purpose is to maximize one’s own benefit from the meeting in terms of fulfilling one’s own needs (Kvalsund &

Allgood, 2008). In other words, if you are interested in forcing your perspective onto the other person without considering that person's will, interest, perspective, thoughts and ideas, in short the other person's experience, a true dialogue cannot occur (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008).

Kvalsund and Allgood (2008) suggest that in helping processes, independence is often regarded as the ultimate goal. In this dimension, the individual is free and enabled to do for herself what she before needed help to accomplish. Signs of mutuality are then confirmations that the process is about to come to an end: Independency is achieved and the helping endeavour can terminate. The helpee is found to be a self-sufficient individual and the possibility of returning to the helper from the withdrawn state of independence, transcending individuality and entering a potentially transformative, interdependent dialogue is thus lost. Bearing this in mind, the authors propose that the ideal of the isolated, individual self should be replaced by the self-as-agent ideal (Macmurray, 1957/1999) in a relational system of partial selves that become whole in the mutual dialogue with the other.

In such an understanding, the helping process is considered a transformative dialogue in which the ultimate goal is for the two parties to experience self-development and mutual understanding (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Transformative learning involves a deep shift of consciousness where this changes the individual's understanding of herself and her world and thus her way of being in the world (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; O'Sullivan, 1999). It is assumed that "*something new can emerge that was not in the minds of either party when the dialogue started*" (Allan & Whybrow, 2008, p. 136).

In the transformative dialogue, each party learns something from the encounter with the other, not in terms of external knowledge, such as historical facts, or mathematical connections, but rather, personal knowledge (Macmurray, 1961/1999). In recognising the otherness of the other, both persons discover more of who they are. According to Kvalsund & Allgood (2008): "*I become myself as a true individual, because you become yourself as a true individual, both similar to and different from me*" (p. 201). The otherness of the other must therefore be acknowledged and valued, insofar as the sameness must be appraised and accepted. Otherwise, the sameness will exist at the expense of the difference and the separateness of the other, which constitutes the otherness from which I can learn to be myself. If this were the case, my security would be dependent on the sameness: you

being the same as me, and therefore recognisable and safe (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Such a state involves regression to the anxiety of dependency where the individual is totally dependent on the other's willingness to adequately and timely respond to her needs, just like the child who experiences anxiety when her needs are not immediately met (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

In this case, the helper must ensure that the helpee experiences independency in terms of feeling like an individual in her own right, capable of taking charge of her own actions and choices in the world before she can be further challenged. On the other hand, this individuality must in turn be challenged for transcendence or return to the interdependency stage to occur (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Otherwise, the helpee will become self-sufficient in her individuality, not considering the other person. As mentioned above, this is where the helping relationship tends to end because mutuality and interdependency are not sufficiently valued (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008).

The interdependency stage involves an appraising and valuing of both the sameness and the otherness of the other person. In the independency stage, on the other hand, sameness is not valued because it is the otherness that is needed for the individual to become self-sufficient and independent and thus enabled to act for herself in the world (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). However, a potential for development into more dynamic relational, dialogic learning, transformation and development will be lost. It is suggested here that the transformative potential of the dialogue lies in the possibility of exploring the similarities and differences, the sameness and the otherness, and through this *"they will both learn to be more fully persons"* (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008, p. 201).

Entering such a dialogue implies that both parties have transcended the dependence of their relationship and are therefore independent enough to welcome the engagement in the other in a more symmetric, mutual way of relating. However, because we are different, and open up in the dialogue to explore this difference, the otherness of the other, this stage implies conflict, insecurity, unease and discomfort. The challenge is to be enabled to relate more constructively even when conflicting phases emerge (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). The dialogue thus becomes a potentially creative and transformative force in which the two persons are able to take in the otherness of the other person and see the world through her eyes and simultaneously experience herself as different and separate from the other.

2.8.3.3. Coaching as an interdependent, transformative dialogue

As shown above, mutuality is seen as a basic condition of the coaching endeavour when it comes to both of the parties recognising the other as a capable, resourceful individual who contributes to a co-constructive developmental process (Kvalsund, 2005a; Stelter, 2014). As argued by Kvalsund (2005a), interdependence requires that the two parties have experienced positive independence in the relationship, as well as a mutual wish and interest in not leading each other into the state of dependence. These appear to be characteristics of the coaching process, the positive independence is recognised because the two regard each other as competent, independent contributors to the process (Stelter, 2014). Moreover, the preference to not promote dependency might seem as an inherent consequence of this basic condition: the two parties are prepared to nurture and promote each other's independence.

However, as shown above, in small or large cycles the dynamic of the relationship implies regressions to the various stages, as shown in the section about the cycle of contact, withdrawal and return. For instance, when in the example above the coach asks the coachee to explore her experience of being stressed, during the withdrawal of the coachee into a reflexive, explorative mode, she might experience the dependency of the coachee in terms of a need to be confirmed as a competent and skilful coach. If the coachee responds by rejecting the request, she might feel utterly dependent on the coachee's reassurance that she is still regarded as competent and skilful, even though exactly this question did not have maximum effect at the given moment. Similarly, the coachee's response might manifest an experienced dependence in the relationship: She feels unable to think for herself and explore her feelings, and wishes to maintain dependence in the relationship by demanding that the coach act as the expert who provides solutions. Even though such a request in a sense violates the fundamental principle of the coaching endeavour, that of the autonomy, independence and self-directedness of the coachee, the wish to be dependent and other-directed might be manifested in moments or stages of the process or might take the form of a rejection of the basic premise of the process. Then the relationship might be forced into termination, as in the example above.

However, interdependence might arise in the relationship between the coach and coachee in the sense that both parties are interested in exploring the otherness of the other person, as well as confirming the sameness, by seeing some of oneself in the

other (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). When the coach and the coachee are prepared to challenge and be challenged by the other person's otherness, they might experience a transformative dialogue. Returning again to the example above, when the coach challenges the coachee to explore her experience of feeling stressed, the coachee might oppose the challenge by stating that she is not yet ready for this. This might, as shown, imply both tension and conflict, dependency and independency, however, in the dialogue, the two might transcend into interdependence by recognising and considering the otherness of the other, while at the same time maintaining and expanding the sameness. By expanding the understanding of how the other person thinks and understands the world, the sameness is also expanded. If the coach and the coachee continue the process, although with an adjustment as to the expectations of the process, they might have learned more about the other person, as well as learned more about themselves when it comes to discovering new ways of being in the relationship with the other person.

As shown above, the ability to enter the transformative dialogue is related to the individual's ability to take the perspective of the other person. In the section below, this quality will be outlined through the concept of empathy.

2.9. Empathy

If the coach is to facilitate and enhance the process of growth and development of the coachee, it is suggested that the ability to express an empathic attitude is a fundamental quality of the coaching endeavour (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). Empathy is about trying to understand the other person's life-world and see what the other person sees, *as if* one were seeing the world through the other person's eyes (Rogers, 1980/1995). It implies a deep intention and ability to understand the life-world of the other person from her perspective, and, so to speak, experience what the other person is experiencing. It is about "*entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it*" (Rogers, 1980/1995, p. 142).

Borrowing from Gendlin's (1962/1997) concept of "experiencing", Rogers (1980/1995) suggests that empathy involves the willingness to sensitively help the client to explore her moment-to-moment experiencing. This flow of experience might, however, be complex, contradictory and blurred, and trying to understand the experience of the client on her terms and in the way she experiences things might

therefore be difficult. However, this task is not about explaining and interpreting the meaning of the experience to the client from an external frame of reference or from an expert position, but rather it is about dwelling with the other person in her experience, making suggestions which give the client something to “bounce ideas and insights against” which might enable her experience to be probed (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

Rogers (1980/1995) illustrates the empathy concept through an example, here freely reconstructed: A client is talking about his relationship to his father. The therapist says that it sounds as though he is angry with his father. The client replies “no”, he is not angry. The therapist then asks whether he is discontented? No, that’s not exactly it either. The therapist then probes with the verb “disappointed”, and the client immediately exclaims: “That’s it!” This example might illustrate how the most conspicuous quality of the empathic coach is her ability and willingness to probe and check with the coachee as to whether her experience of the situation resonates with that of the coachee (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). In this way, the helper becomes a “*confident companion to the person in his or her inner world*” (Rogers, 1980/1995, p. 142).

Moreover, the example illustrates the pragmatic and co-constructive dimensions of the helping process which pervades Rogers’ thinking (Kvalsund, 2015b). In this perspective, providing helpful help (Schein, 2009) is a reciprocal, dynamic, cooperative two-way process in which the degree of helpfulness and usefulness is continuously evaluated (Kvalsund, 2015b). In addition, the example shows the constructive nature of the helping process in which language plays a significant role: it is through language that meaning is constructed (Rorty, 1979). The empathic coach might help the coachee put her experience into words. In the above example, the meaning of the helpee’s experience with his father is at the boundary of his consciousness, and in the facilitative relational process with the counsellor, this meaning might rise to the surface and thus become understandable to him.

In relation to empathy, the sensitivity of the helper is underscored (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). The coach must be willing to let herself be guided and led by the client, rather than being the expert in interpreting the signals communicated by the client (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011). Checking questions, by which the coach asks the coachee whether her understanding concurs with the experience of the coachee, are therefore important tools in this endeavour (Kvalsund, 2006; Ivey et al., 1998).

The trust in the helpee's ability to take charge of herself is, again, the fundamental assumption of the existential-humanistic helping process and a guiding principle in relation to the empathic attitude of the helper (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Rogers, 1961/2004, 1980; Thorne, 1991).

For instance, asking the coachee questions such as "*How do you feel about me asking these questions?*" might provide the coach with important process information, according to which she can adjust her interventions in the coaching process. In relation to the example in the section above, it can be argued that if the coach frequently meta-communicates with the coachee, by asking about the process, the illustrated situation where the coachee suddenly expresses a critical view of the process might have been avoided. The attempt to understand the other person to see what underlies and motivates the empathic attitude is not about understanding the other from an expert position in which the coach understands the psyche of the coachee better than herself, but rather involves the ability and courage to ask checking questions leading into the moment-to-moment experience of the coachee (Ivey et al., 1998; Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

2.9.1. Empathy versus identification

Rogers cautions that empathy must not be confused with identification (Rogers, 1951/2003; 1980/1995). The distinction between these two states of mind is expressed in the following quotation:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this "as if" quality is lost, then the state is one of identification (Rogers, 1959, pp. 210-211, author's quotation marks).

Paradoxically, empathy involves both seeing the other as oneself and at the same time recognising the otherness of the other, and this has aspects that have been described as central characteristics of the dialogue above (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Fully understanding another person's experience is impossible because this would imply

that one *becomes* the other person. Hypothetically speaking, if you could become the other person, you would not be in a position to help her.

Rogers (1980/1995) maintains that it is by being able to discriminate the other person's experience from one's own that one becomes capable of showing empathy. If the helper is to understand the helpee's experience, she must be in contact with, accept and approve her own experience. Self-insight is thus a prerequisite for empathy (Kvalsund, 2005b)²¹. Furthermore, empathy involves confidence because the helper must give herself up to the life-world of the other, and at the same time, knowing that she will not get lost or be overwhelmed by the experience of the other. She must feel reassured that she knows, so to speak, the way back to herself (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

Rogers (1980/1995) suggests that empathy might "dissolve alienation". By feeling that someone understands her, a sense of contact with the other person might emerge in the helpee. Due to this experience of contact, she is no longer isolated and alienated in her experience but might experience, at an existential level, a deep sense of contact with the world and with the human race. Rogers (1980/1995) refers to research he carried out together with several colleagues (Rogers, Gendlin, Kiesler, & Truax, 1967) in which they showed that when schizophrenic clients felt understood, the symptoms of their schizophrenia diminished. In other words, they were lifted "*out of the world of estrangement, and into the world of relatedness*" (Rogers, 1980/1995, p. 152). The feeling of being understood by another is likely to entail a feeling of being valued, cared for and accepted for the person one is, which might then foster acceptance of oneself (Rogers, 1980/1995).

A perspective on the helping relationship, and the developmental process in coaching, as understood from an existential-humanistic frame of reference has thus been established here. Bearing this in mind, below coaching will be discussed in relation to other kinds of helping relationships and other perspectives on coaching.

²¹ The book that this text is a part of is, similarly to Allgood & Kvalsund (2003) not really an edited book. Nevertheless, since the two authors have written separate chapters, it is presented as an edited book in the reference list. This appears to a larger degree as an edited book than the 2003 publication, in terms of the chapters not being interconnected to the same extent. For this reason, I have chosen not to refer to the book as a whole in this text, but rather, I refer to a specific chapter, written by Kvalsund.

2.10. Existential humanistic coaching contextualised

In the first part of this chapter the relationship between coaching and therapy was discussed. It was argued that coaching, as understood from the perspective of person-centred theory, which in this thesis is considered to be part of an existential-humanistic perspective, is not different from therapy in terms of the methods, techniques and interventions used and the basic attitude of the helper (Joseph, 2006; 2014). The difference lies, on the other hand, in such contextual factors as the themes raised in the conversation and the clients who seek the various helping contexts. It has also been argued that there is a perceived difference in the relationship between the therapist and the client, and in the experience of the relationship between the coach and the coachee (Hart et al., 2006).

In the following section coaching is discussed in relation to other kinds of helping relationships and in comparison to other coaching orientations.

2.10.1. What makes coaching coaching?

The existential-humanistic perspective on coaching suggested in this thesis is one of many possible approaches to the coaching endeavour (Palmer & Whybrow, 2008; Cox, Bachirova & Clutterbuck, 2014). Just as the field of counselling and therapy is characterised by a variety of theories and models, methods and techniques (Ivey et al., 2012), the coaching field has evolved to encompass a large range of perspectives. Gestalt coaching, cognitive coaching, narrative coaching and existential coaching are just a few of the directions that have emanated from the field of counselling and therapy (Palmer & Whybrow, 2008).

It has been suggested that the “general ethos” (Joseph, 2014) of Rogerian theory, the fundamental assumption that the client is the expert and able to take charge of her life is commonly accepted and adopted in the coaching field (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph 2014; Nelson et al., 2014). As such, this fundamental assumption could have been seen as a distinguishing factor of coaching. However, a problem arises in that it does not, as mentioned, clearly discriminate coaching from existential-humanistic counselling and therapy (Joseph, 2006, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008).

2.10.1.1. Three generations of coaching

Stelter (2014a, 2014b) suggests that the relatively young history of coaching can be understood in terms of three “generations”. The first generation is characterised by a focus on developing action strategies to reach specific goals, and includes sports coaching, the GROW model, NLP coaching, and cognitive-behavioural and psychodynamic approaches. Stelter (2014a) argues that within this orientation, *“the coach risks slipping into the role as expert or as the most knowledgeable in the relationship, which ultimately goes against the basic principles of coaching”* (p. 52). The second generation focuses more on the coachee’s strengths and resources as a point of departure for development processes, and includes, according to Stelter (2013, 2014a), such perspectives as positive psychology and solution-focused coaching. In this orientation, the scope is broadened, in the sense that the goals are no longer specific to the same extent as in first-generation coaching. Finally, the third generation of coaching is believed to draw on and extend the perspectives promoted in the second generation, however, more narrative and collaborative orientations are brought into the coaching endeavour. Stelter (2014a) argues that the transition from the second to the third generation of coaching involves a shift in the basic idea of the coach, in that she now becomes more of a fellow human being than merely a facilitative, neutral party in the relationship.

The existential-humanistic perspective on coaching promoted in this thesis might be said to better fit into the third generation proposed by Stelter (2014a, 2014b) than the first, in the sense that the coach is regarded as a person-in-relation (Macmurray, 1961/1999) to the coachee (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Kvalsund, 2005a), and because the mutual, transformative dialogue is seen as a goal of the coaching endeavour (Buber, 1958/2000; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). However, it might also be argued that this perspective fits into the description of the second generation, due to this theoretical framework’s extensive focus on the coachee’s self-actualisation and her perceived ability and resources to solve her own challenges (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2012; Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies; Kvalsund, 2005a; Rogers, 1959; 1961/2004; 1980/1995).

2.10.1.2. Is goal-setting a defining factor in coaching?

It must be mentioned that the perspectives that Stelter (2014a) associates with the first generation of coaching are still present in the field (Cox et al., 2014; Palmer & Whybrow, 2008). For instance, goal orientation is still promoted as an important aspect of coaching (Ives & Cox, 2012), although being an area of debate (David, David, & Megginson, 2013; Megginson, 2014). However, as the categorisation proposed by Stelter (2014a, 2014b) shows, the focus on goal setting and goal attainment cannot be a defining factor in coaching as such since this is not promoted in all theories and orientations as the most predominant part of the coaching endeavour. It might be argued that every helping process is in a sense goal-oriented due to its primary aim at personal development and growth, where the underlying assumption of movement from one point to another is present. Considering this, coaching is not necessarily any more or any less goal oriented than other helping processes, although this dimension is emphasised in much of the coaching literature (David et al., 2013).

2.10.1.3. Can a coach give advice?

The question of whether a coach can give advice or whether giving advice might be regarded as part of the coaching repertoire seems to be one of the most important debates in the coaching field. Brian Underhill's (n.d.) blog post might illustrate the prevalence of this controversy: *"I committed an unforgivable sin in the eyes of some – I committed the "A" word. I gave **advice** to this leader during a coaching session"* (author's emphasis). This seems to reflect the most common perception of advice giving in relation to coaching. Advice giving breaks with the principle of the self-directedness of the coachee (Manning, 2008). In coaching, a fundamental principle is the assumption that the coachee is capable of solving her own problems and that the task of the coachee is to facilitate the process of establishing contact with the inner resources needed to find her own solutions (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008).

In many cases, however, there seems to be a fine line between coaching and advice giving. One school of thought in the field holds that the coach might give advice as long as she is aware that she is, then, not coaching (Manning, 2008). She takes her coaching hat off, metaphorically speaking, and moves into a different role, for instance, that of the mentor, advisor or consultant. It is suggested, however, that if

advice is followed by a checking question that stimulates reflection on the part of the coachee, advice giving might be effective (Manning, 2008).

2.10.1.4. Coaching, mentoring and guidance

Mentoring is, as understood in this thesis, a more long-lasting relationship than coaching (Clutterbuck, 2007; Kvalsund, 2009). This involves a mentor and a mentee, with the mentor assisting a person's learning and developmental process in a specific area in which the mentor has expertise and experience (Kvalsund, 2009). The mentoring process rests on the assumption that the mentor has already been through the "journey" that the mentee is to undertake. She communicates her knowledge of standards and expectations in relation to the tasks that the mentee is to perform (Kvalsund, 2009).

An example of a mentoring relationship might be the relationship between a Ph.D. candidate and her supervisor. Without the expertise and experience in the specific area in which the mentee wishes to learn and develop, a person cannot be a mentor (Kvalsund, 2009). Such expertise might also be held by the coach in relation to the coachee, but this is not her predominant competence (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2009; Whitmore, 2009). The expertise of the coach is, as understood in this thesis, rather the process-oriented competence of helping the coachee explore her personal relationship to the issue in question, and in this way being enabled to make discoveries and become more aware of who she is in a given context (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014; Kvalsund, 2005a).

Several elements in mentoring are descriptive of the understanding of guidance²² in this thesis (Johannessen et al., 2010; Kvalsund, 2005a). A guide is also someone who has knowledge and expertise in the area in which the helpee needs assistance (Johannessen et al., 2010). For instance, one might in the Norwegian context seek a "studies guide" who helps students orient themselves in the university or college system. However, whereas guidance might take place in a one-time session between two persons, a mentoring relationship is one in which the mentor and the mentee commit to a helping process (Johannessen et al., 2010; Kvalsund, 2009).

²² "Veiledning" is the Norwegian word for guidance, a term which literally means "showing the direction". The word "veiledning" is in some contexts used in the way that "counselling" is used in this thesis, namely as an umbrella concept for the helping field (i.e. Kroksmark & Åberg, 2007).

It might seem as though the early understanding of coaching, which Stelter (2014a, 2014b) describes as the first generation of coaching, is, in many respects closer to the idea of mentoring than the perspective on coaching promoted in this thesis. The etymological origin of the noun “coaching” stems from the town Kocs in Hungary, where a specific type of horse-drawn wagon was constructed (Cox et al., 2014). The meaning of the word is therefore related to moving someone from one place to another. The word “coach” was first used in a helping context in England in the 19th century about a tutor who would help students through the exam through the combination of his knowledge and skilful guidance (Bachirova et al., 2014; Skagen, 2007). Moreover, in the first study published about “coaching” (Gorby, 1937), looked into how the knowledge of experienced employees was transferred to new employees as they entered an organisation. The perspective on coaching reflected in these early understandings of coaching is more commensurate with the concept of mentoring (Kvalsund, 2009) than coaching, as understood in this thesis.

In the following, the idea of coaching as an approach will be outlined.

2.10.2. Coaching as approach or profession?

Clarifications, definitions and distinctions in the helping field are necessary and helpful in terms of contributing to communicating to potential helpees what kind of professional helper they should look for in relation to specific challenges. However, there are no absolute boundaries between the different helping contexts (Kvalsund, 2005a, 2015b). For instance, therapeutic moments might occur in coaching and coaching elements might be present in the therapeutic encounter. On the other hand, a therapist might desert her intentions of being therapeutic and a coach can be “non-coaching”. Bearing this in mind, coaching might be understood from different viewpoints, as also touched upon in the introduction. On the one hand, it can be seen as a specific kind of formalised, professional helping relationship characterised by a set of definitions, expectations and contracts between the coach and the coachee (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Gjerde, 2010; Moen, 2009). On the other hand, coaching might be seen as a communicative approach). Just like Macleod (2003) argues that people can be more or less counselling, people might in this understanding be more or less “coaching” in their way of communicating in a specific conversation or context. As will be shown in the next chapter, this latter understanding is to a large degree formative for the understanding of coaching leadership in this study.

A discussion on how coaching is believed to differ from other helping orientations, and how the existential-humanistic perspective might be distinguished from other understandings of coaching has thus been presented here. In the final section of this chapter, critical reflections on the existential-humanistic perspective on coaching will be presented.

2.11. Critical reflections on the existential-humanistic perspective

Existential-humanistic theory in general, and as it is expressed in the person-centred theory of Carl Rogers in particular, has proved sustainable in the sense that his focus on the helping relationship and the attitude of the therapist has been generally adopted into the therapeutic domain (Ivey et al., 2012; Thorne & Sanders, 2013; Yalom, 1995). Person-centred theory has been heavily researched over the years, both by Rogers himself, in cooperation with colleagues, and by numerous other researchers (Cooper, 2008; Ivey et al., 2012; Kvalsund, 2015b; Wampold, 2001). Rogers continuously revised and refined his theory in accordance with further research, discussions and criticism (Ivey et al., 2012).

However, just as any other theory, this orientation can be critiqued on several points. Possible criticisms of this theoretical framework in relation to the coaching context are therefore discussed in the following.

2.11.1. The therapeutic relationship: Necessary and sufficient?

Although the basic principles of person-centred theory have been adopted into a variety of helping contexts and orientations, a common criticism is that the reliance on the quality of the helping relationship and active, reflective listening as the main method is simply not sufficient as an intervention that will lead to change in the individual (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Ivey et al., 2012). This objection has been present since the theory was first launched, and has been taken to extremes in the above-mentioned parodies of the non-directive approach, where the therapist merely repeats the last words expressed by the client (Rogers, 1980/1995; Yalom, 1995). Since research has shown that the Rogerian method has a positive effect on clients, this criticism seems to come from people who have different orientations and believe in different methods and techniques.

However, practitioners with an existential-humanistic orientation might also struggle with maintaining the belief in the process of self-actualisation and the

helpee's capacity to solve her own issues, and for this reason may look to more action-oriented methods, for instance (Hutterer, 1993). Holding tight to this assumption might create tension in the helping encounter on both sides of the relationship (Schein, 2009). The client often seeks the therapist because she does not feel capable of taking charge of her life, and therefore communicates dependency and reliance on the therapist's expertise and ability to help her find solutions (Kvalsund & Allgood 2008; Schein, 2009). This might also be the case in coaching, as shown in several examples in the previous chapter.

Rogerian theory might therefore be criticised for not responding to the need of the helpee by refusing to provide answers and solutions for her. Schein (2009) suggests that the impulse to respond to the expectancy of the helpee about being the expert, by acting as an expert, is powerful, even in situations where she does not have the expertise needed to act as an expert. The question is whether this response provides helpful assistance to the client, especially in the long run. As shown earlier in this chapter, the existential-humanistic perspective rests on the assumption that the primary task of the helper is to help the helpee to help herself (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003; Falk, 2010; Schein, 2009).

2.11.2. Individualism versus altruism – or both?

With its focus on the individual's self-actualisation and the realisation of one's potential, existential-humanistic theories are easily associated with negative, anti-social forms of individualism (Johannessen et al., 2010) that might foster egotism and narcissism. However, the aim of facilitating the process of self-actualisation of the individual does not, according to person-centred theory, come at the cost of the self-actualisation of other individuals (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1961/2004). A general argument which, in principle, applies to all therapeutic processes with a positive outcome is that an individual who experiences psychological wellness is likely to have more energy and surplus in relation to other people.

Rogers (1961/2004; 1969/1994) suggested that his theory would be relevant in many contexts and even promoted his core principles as fundamental to diplomatic, cross-national processes in which he also took part during the later years of his career, and for this political engagement he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (Yalom, 1995).

2.11.3. Falling into the trap of relativism?

Rogerian theory has been criticised for verging on cultural relativism (Johannessen et al., 2010). The guiding principle of experience being the “highest authority” might be mistaken for implying that every action, thought and idea is equally true or right, independent of contextual factors. Turning back to the child example used earlier in this chapter, the parent might include the “otherness” of the child, her primary experience that has motivated the action of hitting her little sister, and at the same time convey the ethical principle of not causing harm to other people. Similarly, the helper might convey her values and beliefs, differing as they might from the values and beliefs of the helpee, but at the same time communicate an accepting attitude towards this person as a human being (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). Embracing experience as the highest authority in the encounter implies seeing and accepting the experience of all the persons involved. In this sense, the theory does not adhere to relativism, but rather is anchored in principles of social constructionism and pragmatism (Kvalsund, 2015b; Rogers, 1959). The unfolding experience in the relationship between the common interest and the individual’s self-actualisation becomes a navigational instrument in the encounter (Kvalsund, 2003a).

2.11.4. The reliance of verbal exchange

In a similar way as the psychodynamic tradition, the existential-humanistic perspective has been criticised for its reliance on the verbal exchange between the counsellor and the client (Ivey et al., 2012), and this is believed to limit its relevance to middle- and upper-class people with high cognitive and verbal skills, making it less adequate for the unprivileged, as well as for children and adolescents (Ivey et al., 2012). On this point it might be possible to object because Rogers worked as a therapist in a child clinic for 12 years early in his career (Rogers, 1959; Thorne, 1991). His work was in this instance inspired by the child-centred thinking of the progressive education movement, as manifested by the ideas of John Dewey and his successor William Heard Kilpatrick, who was a teacher of Rogers’ at the teacher’s college at Columbia University (Rogers, 1959). Rogers’ experience in working with children was the foundation on which he developed his theory (Rogers, 1959).

One aspect of the critique relating to the reliance on verbal exchange is that the method developed by Rogers is considered to have little action-orientation and might ultimately be a way of “talking oneself away” from reality. His theory has been

criticised for not offering the action-orientation called for by people who express a need to confront the environmental forces that make them feel restrained or oppressed (Ivey et al., 2012; Sue & Sue, 2008). As a part of the existential-humanistic framework promoted in this thesis, it might be argued that gestalt orientations to the helping encounter have, in contrast to person-centred theory, developed a set of techniques aimed at confronting people in the helpee's life, whether living persons or significant people in her life who have passed away (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey et al., 2012). In this sense, gestalt orientations might be said to offer a more action-oriented way of working.

However, it might be counter-argued that person-centred theory is action-oriented in that it offers a space in which the therapeutic relationship itself becomes a "laboratory" for both the client and the therapist, where they can explore new ways of relating to each other (Rogers, 1961/2004; Thorne, 1991). For instance, when treated with an accepting, non-judgemental attitude the helpee might learn to accept herself and thus become more self-confident, which in turn might impact various dimensions of her being. Furthermore, by being challenged to establish contact with the helper, and express her primary experience, her organismic response (Rogers, 1959) to the helper, she might as well become better able to express her experience in the encounter with other people in her life. For instance, in the film "Three approaches to psychotherapy", Rogers displays his way of working in a conversation with a real-life client whose name is Gloria (Shostrom, 1965). By helping her explore her experience regarding dilemmas in the intersection between the upbringing of an adolescent daughter and wanting to have a sexual relationship with a man she is not married to, during the session, she seems to become more confident about which choices to make and which actions to take.

Whereas, for instance, cognitive-behavioural orientations are primarily focused on creating change in peoples' thinking and actions (Ivey et al., 2012; Palmer & Szymanska, 2008), Rogerian theory focuses on the environment which is believed to foster human growth and development entailing holistic change in people's lives.

2.11.5. A multicultural theory?

Existential-humanistic counselling and therapy has been criticised for ignoring the relation between the individual and her context, thus being less sensitive to multicultural and feminist issues and clients. It might be argued that the basic assumptions on which the existential-humanistic perspective rests are better suited for understanding human life from a European and Northern American cultural perspective, than from the standpoint of more collectively oriented cultures (Ivey et al., 2012). However, a counter-argument might be that, for instance, person-centred theory shows in its nature a high tolerance for diversity (Hutterer, 1993; Ivey et al., 2012), through its emphasis on experience as the highest authority in the helping relationship (Rogers, 1961/2004). Over the years, in parallel to a continuously growing cultural diversity in the Western world, existential-humanistic theory has included multicultural perspectives to a large degree. Specifically, Clemont Vontress extended the multifaceted perspective on the individual's being-in-the-world to include the spiritual dimension: *überwelt* (Ivey et al., 2012).

In concluding this chapter, some critical perspectives on the existential-humanistic framework proposed in this thesis have been presented and discussed.

2.12. Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined an existential-humanistic perspective on coaching. The concepts of self-actualisation, acceptance and experience have been promoted as key aspects of the coaching process, and the significance of the personal engagement of the coach and the mutual dialogue between the coach and the coachee have been explored through the relational qualities of dependency, independency and interdependency, and dialogue and empathy. Coaching has then been discussed in relation to other helping contexts, and the question of what makes coaching what it is has been discussed. In the last part of the chapter, critical perspectives on the existential-humanistic framework have been discussed. The next chapter includes the leadership context and discusses how principles presented in the present chapter might contribute to understanding coaching in the leadership context when the leader takes the role of the coach.

3. When the leader assumes the role of the coach

Coaching always takes place in a context. The theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter took its point of departure in the context of “specialist” coaching (Anderson, 2013) or “professional” coaching (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Lane et al., 2014). This means that the theories presented primarily propose a framework for understanding the contracted, formal relationship and process between a professional coach and a coachee (Alrø, 2011; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). It has been argued, however, that theories of coaching cannot be directly transferred to coaching in the leadership context, that is, when the leader assumes the role of coach for her employees (Anderson, 2013; McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Peterson & Little, 2005; Sue-Chan, Chen, & Lam, 2011; Watson & Maxwell, 2007).

As mentioned in the introduction, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) contend that when coaching principles, particularly those emanating from the therapeutic context, are directly brought into the leadership context without being adjusted and integrated into an overarching leadership model, a categorical mistake has been made. In this thesis it has been argued that theories from the field of counselling and therapy apply to a great extent to the coaching context. However, it is assumed, in accordance with Molly-Søholm and Molly’s (2013) stance, that a further, direct transfer of these principles into the leadership context cannot be made. This implies the recognition that there are conceptual differences between the professional coach and the coaching leader, particularly in two areas: responsibility and power. It is assumed that the leader’s responsibility for the overall production and results of the organisation (Northouse, 2007), and thus ultimately for the performance of the employee, makes the coaching position of the leader different from that of the professional coach, who is *not* directly involved in the coachee’s work context (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). The ways in which these positions are different will be further explored and discussed in this chapter.

Moreover, the coaching position of the professional coach and that of the coaching leader are believed to be different in light of the power aspects of the relationship. By virtue of the personnel responsibility, the leader holds formal power in the relationship with the employee in terms of being entitled to both employ and dismiss the employee, as well as determine her working conditions (McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Pedersen, Svendsen, & Einarsen, 2015). These conceptual differences

are believed to create both ethical and theoretical tensions in the concept of coaching leadership.

These tensions will be further explored in this chapter, in accordance with the ways in which the coaching principles presented in the previous chapter might, on the next level, be relevant, problematic, challenging and questionable in the leadership context. The aim of this following chapter is, in other words, to further explore the concept of coaching leadership through the presentation and discussion of various theoretical perspectives.

The chapter commences by defining and delimiting the leadership concept, followed by a discussion on the term coaching leadership compared to the concept of managerial coaching. An organisational perspective will then be briefly outlined, followed by a discussion on coaching leadership from an integral-theory perspective, and then the chapter will conclude with a discussion on helping aspects, power dimensions and ethical challenges of coaching leadership.

3.1. Delimiting the concepts of leadership and organisation

In spite of the significant body of leadership research, it appears to be difficult to establish a common understanding of what leadership is and what characterises good leadership (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2010). According to Bennis (2009): “*To an extent, leadership is like beauty: it’s hard to define, but you know it when you see it*” (p. xxx).²³ One distinction in the field, however, is clarified, that is the difference between “emergent” and “assigned” leadership (Northouse, 2007). Emergent leadership involves the informal area, and might for example refer to the person whom everyone considers to be the leader of the adolescent gang or the person who always takes the lead when a decision has to be made or when a process demands a leader. Assigned leadership, on the other hand, means that a person is given a formal leadership position in an organisation. This is the kind of leadership addressed in this thesis.

The leader, as understood in this study, is a person who holds an assigned leadership position in an organisation, involving personnel responsibility. Moreover, Northouse’s (2007) definition of leadership is descriptive of the understanding of leadership underlying this text: “*Leadership is a process in which one individual*

²³ This might look like an error, but is the actual page number of the quotation. It is taken from the introduction to the 1989 edition which has been included in the 2009 book.

influences a group of individuals in order to reach a common goal” (p. 3). The verb influence and the noun process imply that leadership is perceived as a relational and organic phenomenon. The common goal referred to might for instance be about measurable economic targets, productivity or the quality of services. However, it could also be about more overarching visions and strategies. To further clarify the understanding of leadership in this thesis, the concepts of “leader” and “leadership” will be discussed in the following, in comparison with the concepts of “manager” and “management”.

3.1.1. Leadership and management

An on-going discussion in the leadership field addresses the relationship between leadership and management (Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2010). In this instance, a clarification of these terms asserts itself because the concept which seems to be the most frequently used in the coaching field is the term “managerial coaching”, or “manager-as-coach” (i.e. Hagen, 2012, McCarthy & Milner, 2013, Joo et al., 2012), as briefly mentioned in the introduction. The results of literature searches where the key words “coaching leadership” have been used only limitedly refer to coaching leadership, as understood in this thesis. For instance, while examining the results, some of the published literature appears to be about “executive coaching”. On the other hand, a literature search where the key terms “managerial coaching” or “manager-as-coach” have been utilised provides significantly more precise results: these publications seem to exclusively address what, in this project, has been called “coaching leadership”.

The terms manager and leader are often used interchangeably (Kotterman, 2006; Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2010). Whereas leadership has been researched, debated and explored over thousands of years (Kotterman, 2006; Northouse, 2007), the term manager, and management, is relatively new (Kotterman, 2006). It is argued that this concept has evolved along with the emergence of the modern organisation, where the managerial function is needed to create order in the complexity (Kotterman, 2006). There is a controversy over whether these concepts are qualitatively different, in which ways they differ and whether such distinctions are important (Kotterman, 2006). Kotterman (2006) argues that these terms describe qualitatively different phenomena, rather than merely different leader styles, and he suggests that leaders and managers are both involved in the process of “*establishing*

direction, aligning resources, and motivating people” (p. 14). However, they have different roles in this process. Whereas management involves planning, budgeting, problem solving, stabilising, controlling and organising (Kotterman, 2006; Nebecker & Tatum, 2002), leadership implies setting directions and goals, and motivating and inspiring people to achieve these goals (Kotterman, 2006). Whereas management is about establishing and maintaining standards and ensuring consistency and predictability in the organisation, leadership is about inspiring change and development processes (Kotter, 1990; Kotterman, 2006; Zaleznik, 1998).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) express the difference between the two concepts as follows: “*A manager is someone who does things right, whereas a leader is someone who does the right thing*” (p. 21). This quote might reflect the above argument; whereas the managerial function maintains the status quo in the best possible way, the leadership dimension ensures development, progress, initiative and innovation. However, it might also communicate a common view in the field, where the manager is often regarded as a person who performs her tasks in a qualitatively poorer manner than a leader: an impaired version of the leader (Gardner, 1990; Kotter, 1990; Rost, 1991). According to Rost (1991), “*the good guy/bad guy view of leadership/management is pervasive in the 1980’s literature on leadership*” (p. 141). However, it is argued that both functions are crucial in organisations. Rost (1991) suggests that management implies making the “trains run on time”, and rhetorically asks what job satisfaction would be like in an organisation if employees did not receive their salary, the office environment had an unsatisfactory temperature or meetings did not keep to the schedule. These are pivotal tasks of management, and competent management is thus a prerequisite for organisational functioning (Rost, 1991).

It is suggested that leadership and management do not exclude each other, rather that they are interdependent qualities that both need to be maintained for the organisation to achieve its goals (Kotterman, 2006; Rost, 1991). For this reason, they should be distinguished from each other, rather than confusing their meaning. It has been suggested that in many contexts, what is thought to be leadership is actually management, according to the distinctions and definitions provided above (Kotter, 1995; Kotterman, 2006). However, definitions and distinctions made from a theoretical perspective might not be applicable in everyday language, and their function might thus be questioned. In the English language, the word “middle

manager”, according to the electronic dictionary “Clue”, is the only term suggested for describing the leader who reports to a leader above her in the organisational hierarchy. According to this definition, most of the leaders in this study should be labelled “middle managers” as the majority of them report to leaders above them. Bearing this in mind, it might be argued that the most adequate designation for the phenomenon studied in this project is “managerial coaching”.

However, one selection criterion for finding the informants in this study is that they have personnel responsibility. Bearing the above definitions of leadership and management in mind, it seems more adequate to define this responsibility as a part of the leader function than the manager function. It has been argued that leadership is about inspiring change and development processes (Kotter, 1990; Kotterman, 2006; Zaleznik, 1998) and about influencing people (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2010). Coaching is concerned with facilitating change and development processes for individuals and groups (Clutterbuck, 2007; Molly-Søholm, Juhl, & Molly-Søholm, 2008), and might therefore be more adequately associated with the leader function than the manager function. This is not to say that a manager cannot develop coaching skills and use these in her day-to-day interaction with people in the organisation, just like any other person might develop coaching skills to, for instance, communicate more adequately with people around her.

Since the manager and leader function might be maintained by the same person in an organisation, the choice to use the term “coaching leadership” rather than “managerial coaching” or “manager-as-coach” about the concept being studied in this thesis is not linked to the degree of leadership or management associated with the specific leaders in this study. Rather, it is a theoretically anchored choice. The term “coaching leadership” is, according to the understanding of leadership and management outlined above, considered to most precisely describe the concept under study.

One challenge in using this term is that it does not immediately reflect the assumption underpinning this thesis, that coaching within leadership must be paralleled with other approaches. Leaders have a number of roles to play (Hagen, 2012) with various stakeholders in and outside the organisation (Maak & Pless, 2006). It is therefore assumed that the leader cannot and should not coach in all situations within her leadership (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). In this instance, the term managerial coaching better reflects this understanding of coaching leadership as

coaching is regarded as an activity that can be juxtaposed with other activities. On the other hand, the term coaching leadership seems to imply that coaching is everything the leader does. Bearing this in mind, the terms “leadership coaching” or “leader coaching” might have been more plausible in this context. However, according to database searches, these concepts seem to be associated with what is most commonly referred to as executive coaching. Another possibility, with this argument in mind, could have been to apply the term proposed by Molly-Søholm et al. (2013): “leadership-based coaching”.

In relation to the concept “coaching-based leadership”, which has also been used in describing the same phenomenon (Moen & Skaalvik, 2009; Moen & Federici, 2012), leadership-based coaching is believed to better reflect the stance taken in this thesis: coaching is one of several leadership activities and the leadership is not coaching-based in the sense that everything the leader does is interpreted from the perspective of coaching. Rather, coaching takes place within the leadership context. In this study, the use of the term coaching leadership implies that the part of leadership that might be understood, explored and examined from a coaching perspective is what is of interest in this study.

I am not suggesting that coaching leadership replaces other leadership concepts. On the contrary, it is assumed that coaching leadership is compatible with a variety of leadership approaches. The ways in which coaching leadership relates to other theories, styles and approaches is, however, not the primary scope of this thesis, as stated in the introduction. Coaching leadership is discussed in relation to various perspectives on leadership and organisations, but it is not suggested that coaching is “married” to one specific leadership theory. Similarly, coaching leadership is not linked in this thesis to a particular organisational theory, and making such a connection is not emphasised in this project. However, since the organisation is the context in which coaching leadership takes place, a clarification of the organisational perspective underpinning this study is required. A perspective on the organisation will therefore be briefly outlined in the following.

3.1.2. A perspective on the organisation

An initial definition of an organisation is a unit in which individuals and resources are coordinated to achieve its goals (Daft, 2012). Furthermore, the coaching context in this study is the professional organisation in which people are engaged in professional, formal working conditions and draw their salary (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick, & Walker, 2007). A multitude of metaphors has been applied to describe and understand the nature of organisations, and different metaphors have been predominant in different eras of organisational theory (Morgan, 2006). In organisational theory, mechanical metaphors, such as the image of the machine, have been more or less replaced by more organic metaphors (Morgan, 2006). This implies a shift in the view of leadership, and in the role of the employee. Roughly speaking, from regarding the employee as a more or less useful cog in the machinery, in which the designing and developing of the system has been undertaken by leaders and engineers, and where the work has been performed by the working hands of the employees (Morgan, 2006), the employee is to a larger degree now viewed as a potentially creative, innovative and resourceful agent who actively contributes to the construction of the organisation.

This shift follows from societal changes in terms of communication technology, globalisation and migration (Graetz, 2000; Todnem By, 2005). Increased competition in a globalised and technologized market has forced organisations to generate innovative and developmental processes where the unique qualities of the ensemble of employees are recognised and nurtured because the way in which the human resources of the organisation are managed and led is regarded an important competitive advantage (Becker & Gerhart, 1996). Arranging for conditions in which employees might discover and develop their unique qualities is, in other words, associated with a competitive advantage in a challenging market (Becker & Gerhart, 1996).

It has been suggested that the benefits of coaching in organisations and therefore also of coaching leadership can be seen in relation to this way of thinking (Ellinger, 1999). Coaching is associated with growth-enhancing and performance-raising processes, and hence, might have become an approach used by leaders who wish to develop more productive, competitive and adaptive organisations (Ellinger et al., 2003; Hagen, 2012; Herrera, 2010). For instance, Hunt and Weintraub (2002)

suggest that coaching leadership might foster “*workplaces that make learning, growth and adaptation possible*” (p. xi).

In addition to being a possible response to the need to address and nurture the unique qualities of each employee in the organisation (Becker & Gerhart, 1996), coaching leadership might also be seen as a response to a growing need to recruit and retain the best employees (Hiltrop, 1999). From the employee perspective, it has been argued that the basic motivation for making career choices has changed over recent decades (Savickas, 2012). Earlier, people were to a larger degree than today loyal to *one* company throughout their working life: in the Norwegian context, employees were granted a gold watch after many years in a company to commemorate lengthy and loyal service (Iversen, 2006). It is argued, however, that in our time, the individual’s loyalty to the organisation is replaced by loyalty to one’s own career (Iversen, 2006; Schjander & Østrem, 1987).

In an ever-changing society, jobs come and go in accordance with changes in market needs and technology development (Gelatt, 1989; Savickas, 2012). One must therefore be prepared to continuously acquire new skills and competencies to keep up with changing job descriptions *within* job positions, and also be prepared to change jobs more often than before (Savickas, 2012). The individual is challenged to arrange for development and learning in a life-long perspective, and such notions as adult learning and life-long learning (Jarvis, 2010) have been actualised. In this perspective, organisations and leaders that focus on employee’s opportunities to develop as a part of their work, which is associated with coaching leadership (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002), might be regarded as attractive to today’s job applicants.

An initial idea of leadership and organisations has thus been outlined here, the case has been made for applying the concept of coaching leadership, and thoughts and theories have been explored to explain why coaching leadership might have been actualised as a leadership form. Below, the coaching leadership concept will be discussed further.

3.2. The external coach versus the coaching leader

It has been proposed that the responsibility to support and facilitate development of employees has gradually shifted from HR functions to the leaders themselves (Anderson, 2013; Anderson et al., 2009; Ye et al., 2016). Hence, discussions have taken place as to the advantages and disadvantages of such a shift, and the difference between having an external and internal coach in the organisation has been addressed (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). The external coach is understood as a professional coach who is hired to assist the process of development of employees at different levels of the organisation, and the internal coach is, for this purpose, delimited to the leader who takes the role of the coach. In the following, these two concepts will be discussed in relation to each another. This comparison is not exhaustive, but rather, some aspects in which the two concepts differ and agree are explicitly discussed, whereas other aspects are more implicitly included in the subsequent sections in which coaching leadership is discussed, without being directly compared to external coaching.

The most conspicuous difference between external coaching and coaching leadership is the conditions of the coaching process. Since the external coach is not a part of the organisation, coaching between an external coach and a coachee in the organisation typically involves planned and agreed-upon “sit-down-sessions” (Anderson, 2013) between the coach and one or several coachees. The coach and the coachee commit to a mutually intended process based on a formal or informal “contract” (Alrø, 2011). In coaching leadership, on the contrary, coaching does not necessarily occur in structured conversations labelled “coaching”, but it also takes the form of informal coaching conversations of long or short duration (Turner & McCarthy, 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction, such informal coaching has been given various names in the literature, such as “coaching on the fly” (Johnson, 2011), “corridor coaching” (Grant, 2010; Grant & Green, 2003) and “anytime coaching” (Kloster & Swire, 2010). Research has pointed out factors that promote and prevent leaders from taking advantage of such informal situations, which have also been called “coachable moments” (Turner & McCarthy, 2015). A coachable moment is defined as “*an informal, usually unplanned or unexpected opportunity for a manager*

to have a conversation with an employee aimed at facilitating the employee to problem solve or learn from a work experience” (Turner & McCarthy, 2015, p. 5).

In this thesis, a result of the analysis process is the introduction of the term “coachability”. The website wictionary.org defines this term as “*the state or condition of being coachable*”. The term coachable is defined by the same website as being “*able to be coached effectively*”. From this meaning of a person being coachable, the concept of “coachable moments” has emerged (Hart, 2005; Kaye, 1993; Mobley, 2001; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). Whereas a coachable moment is the opportunity to have a brief or longer lasting coaching *conversation* with an employee, as understood in terms of the definition above, the coachability of a situation is understood as an *aspect* of a situation or context that makes the coaching approach seem suitable and adequate. For instance, in a situation where the leader conveys information, which is, in itself, non-negotiable, and thus also non-coachable, the coachability in the situation might lie in the opportunity to explore the employees’ reactions, emotions and reflections on the information given, in other words, their *experience* relating to the issue in question. The term coachability is, in other words, not new, but the way in which it is used in the analysis of the data in this study seems slightly different from the way in which it has been used before.

In the following, the leader’s involvement in organisational processes will be explored in relation to coaching leadership.

3.2.1. The involvedness of the coaching leader

It has been suggested that one advantage of the external coach over the coaching leader is that the external coach is disengaged from the organisation’s work processes, and thus has a more independent perspective in relation to the processes that are on the coaching agenda (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). The external coach is, by virtue of being a professional coach, ethically responsible for doing her best to help the coachee with whatever she needs help to achieve (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003), whether the challenge is clearly defined or not, and whether the goals of the coaching process are specifically defined or more existentially oriented. However, she does not share the “ownership” of the goals and objectives themselves, but is rather committed to the helping process as such. In the leadership context, the leader is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the organisation’s goals are fulfilled (Mintzberg, 1998; Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2010). However, at the same time, she is responsible for the

welfare of her employees (Mintzberg, 1998; Pedersen et al., 2015). Is there a space where the leader might be disconnected from her responsibility for the organisational goals and become fully committed to the process of development and growth of the employee? And is such a space a prerequisite for coaching leadership? As will be shown in 3.5.1.1. and 3.5.2. below, this seems to be a controversy in the field of coaching leadership.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that the leader's involvedness in the organisational context in which coaching takes place might also be a resource (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). One advantage might be that the coaching leader has a more frequent opportunity to observe employees in various situations and thus, for instance, give performance feedback "on the spot" (Frish, 2001; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). The concept of feedback is, however, problematic in relation to an existential-humanistic understanding of coaching leadership if the feedback is given from a normative point of view and an external frame of reference, that is, from an expert who "knows" the answer, rather than being based on the employee's internal validation (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). As shown in the previous chapter, feedback in terms of reflection on feelings and meanings in relation to issues presented by the coachee is considered adequate within the coaching context, as understood from an existential-humanistic frame of reference (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). When the leader offers her evaluation of the performance of the employee through feedback, on the other hand, this is done in accordance with her evaluation in relation to organisational goals. It is not proposed here that a leader should not give feedback on the performance of her employees. However, the question arises as to whether it should theoretically be included in or excluded from the coaching leadership concept.

According to O'Neill (2007), a leader can never refrain from being the leader by pretending that she does not have performance expectations while coaching her employees. She holds that the coaching leader should "*both mandate the goals and help people develop the ability to accomplish them* (p. 262). In this perspective, one might imagine that the leader gives feedback to the employee from a normative standpoint, that is, from the point of view of how she, as a leader, believes a task should be performed, but then follows up with coaching, in terms of, for instance, checking out how this feedback is received and experienced and what the employee wants to do with it. Similarly, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) contend that: "*at*

times, the leader steps out of the coach role and gives feedback” (p. 20, my translation). In conclusion, giving feedback is understood as incompatible with assuming the coach’s role within the leadership context.

Some advantages and disadvantages of the coaching leader in relation to the external, professional coach have been discussed here. Below, the responsibilities of the leader will be discussed in relation to coaching.

3.3. The responsibilities of the leader

The leader has a number of responsibilities in her interaction with several stakeholders both within and outside the organisation, such as employees, business partners, clients and customers and parties in the social and natural environment (Maak & Pless, 2006). The different stakeholders might represent different perspectives, worldviews and opinions. An important leader task is therefore to balance these roles and responsibilities (Maak & Pless, 2006), and defining characteristics of leadership are related to the question of how this responsibility is managed and distributed. Over the last 50 years or so, the ideal of an autocratic leadership style has been gradually replaced by more organic, relational and interaction-oriented ideals (Morgan, 2006). It has been argued in section 2.1.3 above that the leader who does not recognise her employees as resources in the organisation and does not let up on the reins and distribute power and responsibility will not be able to create sustainable organisations (Locke, 2003).

A dimension of coaching leadership that seems to be an agreed-upon belief is that coaching leadership is a fundamentally different way of leading than the “traditional” command-and-control leadership paradigm (Whitmore, 2011). Coaching leadership implies an aspect of letting go of control in that employees are seen as resourceful agents (Rogers, 1961/2004). However, it is suggested here that letting go of control does not imply a “laissez-faire” attitude to leadership where the leader, so to speak, “abdicates” from her leadership position (Whitmore, 2011). Rather, the coaching leader is present and actively participating in the processes of the organisation, not in terms of micromanaging, but rather, in the sense that she knows the specific needs and wishes of her employees in relation to their work and is able to facilitate their work processes in such a way that they might develop and grow. Coaching leadership thus involves a facilitative approach requiring an attentiveness to the employees (Whitmore, 2011). Whether such a facilitative approach might as well

go the other way around, so that the employee is attentive to the leader's needs inasmuch as the leader is attentive to the employee's needs, is further questioned and discussed in Chapter 6.

Locke (2003) introduces the idea of an integral leadership concept where a considerable part of the leader responsibilities in the organisation is shared with the employees, but where it is also proposed that some leader responsibilities cannot be shared. He maintains that in a significant part of the organisational processes, the leader must have "the final say", otherwise, differing and conflicting ideas might impair the organisation's ability to work towards a common goal. This means that the leader must at times make decisions at the expense of the opinions, needs and wants of some of the stakeholders in the organisation (Locke, 2003). This does not imply, however, that democratic processes cannot, or should not be an integrated part of the organisation (Locke, 2003).

Finding the balance between listening and making decisions, opening up and closing down processes, and managing the involvement of different stakeholders in the organisation is thus an important leadership task (Locke, 2003; Maak & Pless, 2006). Coaching leadership does not imply a diffuse and ambiguous leader who imposes all her leadership responsibility on the employees and refrains from finding solutions and making decisions (Stelter, 2014a). Rather, the coaching leader shares responsibility and power and facilitates development, learning and growth, combined with clarity about her ultimate responsibility for the organisation and thus for making decisions (Anderson, 2013; Whitmore, 2011). This then means that the coaching leader does not coach in each and all situations within her leadership.

In the following, the integral perspective will be further elaborated on as a way of understanding the multiple responsibilities of the leader.

3.3.1. An integral perspective on the person in the context

As mentioned immediately above, coaching leadership must be understood in relation to the multiple responsibilities of the leader, which might then be seen in light of the complex web of relations, interactions and formal and informal structures that constitute the organisation (Morgan, 2006; Schein, 2004). In this instance, an integral perspective on the person in relation to her context (Wilber, 1995) is proposed in order to better understand how the coaching leader might expand her understanding of

this complexity. The model that will be presented below will form a frame of reference for the discussion in Chapter 6.

It is assumed that a phenomenon can be understood more precisely and be more holistically focused if several perspectives are included and considered (Ivey et al., 2012; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013; Tønnesvang et al., 2013). As understanding increases, the individual is given a broader range of ways to act and the opportunity to relate more adequately to her world, as shown in the previous chapter (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). This theory is presented in the form of a model based on a matrix with four quadrants (Figure 1).

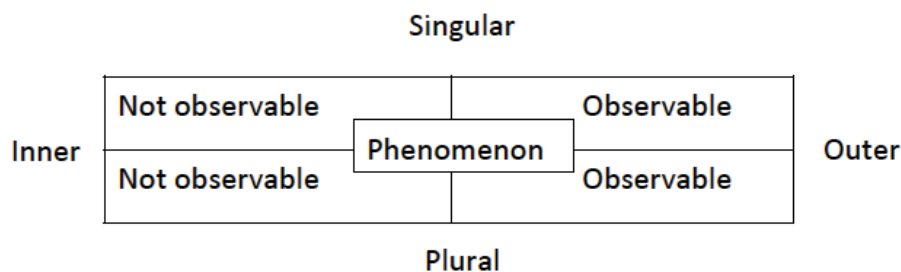


Figure 1: The integral model

Adapted from Tønnesvang et al. (2013) p. 4

In the upper left quadrant, the subjectivity of the person is addressed. In this dimension, the concern is with a person's dreams, prejudices, ideas, beliefs, emotions and experience. These are aspects that concern the phenomenology of a person, dimensions which remain hidden to the environment unless shared by the person herself (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). In the upper right quadrant, observable features of the person, such as actions, body language, height and weight are addressed. Even biological and neurological dimensions of the person might be observable with adequate measurement instruments (Tønnesvang et al., 2013). The upper quadrants are thus concerned with the singular perspective, whereas the lower part of the matrix addresses the plural perspective. The lower left quadrant focuses on the inter-subjective dimensions of a given context, for instance, the cultural features of an organisation. The way in which people talk and act in relation to each other, the tacit norms and discourses and the meaning dimension in collective processes are all part of this quadrant.

Finally, in the lower right quadrant, the observable dimensions, the “inter-objectivity” of a context, are addressed (Tønnesvang et al., 2013). For instance, in an organisation, buildings, furniture, light and temperature are observable aspects, as well as the organisational structure: budgets, reports, plans, espoused visions and values. Moreover, more overarching structures are addressed here, to the extent that they are relevant to the organisation in question, such as governmental guidelines influencing the organisation. The left side of the matrix is thus concerned with the inner dimensions of a phenomenon, features which are not visible to the eye, whereas the right side addresses the outer sides, aspects which might be seen, read or observed by humans or by particular technological devices (Tønnesvang et al., 2013). These four dimensions are, however, not isolated from or independent of each other. On the contrary, they operate simultaneously and interactively (Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013; Tønnesvang et al., 2013). In the terminology of Wilber (1995), they “tetra-arise”. One might imagine that in the centre of the matrix, the person’s being-in-the world is the viewpoint from which the four dimensions might be taken into consideration.

This model might serve as a tool for addressing various dimensions of a given context and for dynamically shifting the focus between the different perspectives. It is assumed that in focusing on one perspective, by using “methodical reduction” (Tønnesvang et al., 2013), this comes to the forefront, whereas the other dimensions move to the background but are still a part of the context and still influence the phenomenon, and which might be re-addressed at any given time in the process (Ivey et al., 2012; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013). The capacity to incorporate the four dimensions simultaneously is considered to be a trainable ability (Wilber, 1995). It has been suggested that a good leader is able to view the world from alternative viewpoints and perspectives (Morgan, 2006).

The integral model might form a frame of reference for understanding coaching leadership in relation to the leader’s multiple responsibilities in the organisation. In the following, coaching leadership will be explored from a helping perspective.

3.4. A helping perspective on the leader-employee relationship

According to Schein (2009), the concept of help is at the heart of social life. The need for help arises anywhere, anytime, and in this perspective we are all helpers and helpees. You might hold the door for a stranger, ask a colleague for computer assistance, give a friend professional advice or ask someone to babysit your children. Such informal helping situations arise all the time in our everyday interaction with people around us (Kvalsund, 2015a; Schein, 2009). On the other hand, there are formal helping situations that are regulated by professional rules and guidelines, such as psychotherapy, counselling and coaching (Kvalsund, 2015a). In formal helping relationships²⁴, a fundamental principle is that the helpee asks for help in some form (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003). The helper then responds to this request by trying to help the helpee from the realm of her competence. However, whether the helper succeeds in providing “helpful help” depends on a complex interplay between numerous factors (Schein, 2009).

Hunt and Weintraub (2002) suggest that coaching leaders “*combine business leadership with a genuine interest in helping those with whom they work*” (p. xi). Furthermore, the authors introduce the idea of a “coaching mindset” which implies an “attitude of helpfulness”. It has been mentioned in the introduction that the leader-employee relationship is not to be considered a *professional helping relationship* in the way that the professional coach-coachee relationship might be. Nevertheless, the conditions under which the leader-employee relationship might contain elements of a helping relationship (Kvalsund, 2005a; Moen, 2010) will be explored and discussed in the following.

The leader-employee relationship is a formal relationship regulated by the legislation governing working life (Pedersen et al., 2015). However, it is not, like the professional coach-coachee relationship, a professional *helping* relationship, in that the contract of employment is not primarily about the one person helping the other. Nonetheless, helping needs might arise in such relationships to the same extent that they emerge in any other relationship, and when such informal helping situations arise, fundamental helping dynamics are activated (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Schein, 2009). From this point of departure, two helping positions, the opposites of

²⁴ A formal helping relationship is understood as a formally contracted relationship in which the primary aim is for the one party to help the other in some way.

each other, can be imagined in the leader-employee relationship: in helping position 1, the employee needs help from the leader, and in helping position 2, the leader needs help from the employee. These will be outlined in the following.

3.4.1. Helping position 1: The employee asks the leader for help

In helping position 1, the employee needs help from the leader, or asks the leader for help in one way or another. The leader might choose to respond to the helping need by taking a coaching approach. In professional coaching, the initiative is taken by the coachee, and the request is clear: the coachee asks the coach for help to develop in relation to specific challenges in her life (Kvalsund, 2005a). In this helping position, issues at different levels might be imagined, and various sorts of questions or requests from the employee might call for dissimilar responses on the part of the leader. For instance, an employee might ask the leader for economic support to participate in a course, or for permission to change routines in a given context. The leader considers the situation and responds according to her knowledge about and responsibility for the whole. The situation might not immediately call for a coaching approach; when the leader asks questions, she does this to better understand the situation and make a decision with this in mind, rather than to help the employee clarify her worldview (Joseph, 2014). Furthermore, one might imagine that the employee asks the leader for professional advice and the response of the leader might be characterised by a mentoring- or guidance-like orientation (Kvalsund, 2005a, 2009). As mentioned in Chapter 2, giving advice is not considered a part of the coaching repertoire, as understood from an existential-humanistic perspective (Kvalsund, 2005a; Manning, 2008).

Stelter (2013) argues, as mentioned in chapter 2, that “first generation coaching”, with a particular emphasis on actions and goals, is not the most adequate approach for understanding coaching leadership since the leader who has such a frame of reference, might easily relapse into the role of the guide or the expert. When the leader responds by giving advice from the point of view of her knowledge and expertise relating to the organisation, this does not concur with the existential-humanistic ideal of helping the coachee explore *her* experience and resources in order to find her own answers and solutions (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). Kvalsund (2005a) identifies this form of coaching as “expert coaching”. However, if the leader is able to let her preconceptions of what is

perceived as smart, right or adequate choices in a given situation move to the background, and, for instance, returns the question to the employee: “*what do you think?*” the intervention might to a larger extent be considered a coaching approach because the employee is given the opportunity to reflect on the issue in relation to her inner frame of reference (Kvalsund, 2005a). The question again arises, however, as to whether such a perspective is too narrow and one-sided if coaching leadership is to involve an element of mutuality. If the leader becomes an almost invisible part of the relationship who only facilitates the employee’s process, does such a relationship become too unilateral to include mutuality? This will be addressed further in Chapter 6.

However, if in accordance with her knowledge and responsibility for the organisation as a whole the leader knows what she wants the employee to say, or which choice she wants her to make, does this disqualify a coaching approach? Is coaching leadership reserved for the issues where there are no given or predetermined answers, just as feedback from a normative standpoint was considered to be outside the coaching repertoire of the leader, as we saw in section 3.2.1? And if, on the contrary, the leader expresses her meaning about the issue, can she still be considered to be within the realm of coaching? This will be further elaborated on in sections 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.2 below.

Another situation that might arise within helping position 1 is that the employee comes to the leader to clarify and sort personal issues, which are relevant to the work context, and that a private²⁵ issue is exposed in the conversation between the two. Certain theories of coaching leadership reject the idea of private issues being on the agenda in coaching leadership. For instance, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) argue that the coaching leader must communicate that the private area and more general self-development issues are not to be part of the coaching conversations. This stance seems to be a way of clearly distinguishing coaching leadership from the therapeutic domain. This perspective will be further discussed in section 3.6 below.

²⁵ In this context, the distinction between personal and private might be explained as follows: the personal domain is present in the conversation whether it is explicitly addressed or not (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Kvalsund, 2003b). The leader and the employee are parts of each other’s field with the entirety of bodily, emotional and cognitive reactions. However, these might be explicitly addressed, for instance when the leader asks the employee: how do you feel about this, or the employee asks the leader: I am wondering what it means when you look at me like this? The private domain means, in this instance, information about other areas of life than the work context, such as family, hobbies, friendships and so on (Skau, 2013). Alrø & Nilles (2015) propose that in the coaching conversation it is the “professional personal” field that is addressed, rather than the “private personal” field.

In the following, the conditions and dynamics of helping position 2 will be presented and discussed.

3.4.2. Helping position 2: The leader is in need of help from the employee

In relation to the idea of a coaching culture, one might imagine that coaching becomes the predominant style of interacting at all levels of the organisation (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005). In such a culture coaching pervades the communication in the workplace, as employees coach each other, the leader coaches her employees and the employees could just as easily coach the leader. Such a situation might be imagined within helping position 2. The leader is in the need of help from the employee, and the employee takes a coaching approach. In this thesis, I will, however, focus on the leader as the coaching party in the relationship but without in any way rejecting the idea of a coaching culture as such. In helping-position 2, the relevant issues could be that the leader needs to acquire an overview of a process, she might need the employee to share her knowledge and experience on particular topics or she might even need the employee to *help* her by adjusting maladaptive behaviour.

In this latter situation, it seems impossible for the leader to take a coaching approach because coaching is considered to be “*an action that the coachee voluntarily accepts based on motives aimed at development or improvement*” (Kvalsund, 2005a, p. 12, my translation). If, for example, the leader calls the employee to a meeting motivated by the leader’s need for the employee to adjust her behaviour, the degree of voluntariness on the part of the employee might be disputed, as she is formally obliged to show up (Storeng, Beck, & Due Lund, 2006).

In a helping situation, the helper is asked for help by the helpee (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003; Schein, 2009). If the help is to be helpful, it cannot be imposed, but rather must be asked for, or wanted (Schein, 2009). Brammer and MacDonald (2003) suggest that the request for help does not necessarily need to be explicit. For instance, when a suicidal person stands on the top of a roof, ready to jump, this might in reality be a disguised “cry” for help. However, from a helping perspective, it seems theoretically impossible for the leader to take a coaching approach from the perspective of helping position 2 when the leader needs help from the employee.

Nonetheless, one might imagine that a situation which can originally be understood as helping position 2 shifts to helping position 1, if, for instance, issues emerge in the conversation in relation to which the employee needs help from the

leader. In such a situation, the leader might, however, take a coaching approach and ask the employee “*how do you feel about this situation?*” If the employee experiences a genuine wish to understand her own situation, and if she experiences trust in the relationship, she might, for instance, share her experience and issues so that the unacceptable behaviour might be addressed. From the perspective of coaching as an *approach* (Roald, 2015), one might say that the leader is taking a coaching approach in a situation, which, from a helping perspective, cannot be seen as a helping situation. However, *because* the leader takes a coaching approach by asking questions, the employee enters the conversation with a readiness to share her experience, and perhaps, a more or less conscious and explicit helping request (Brammer & MacDonald, 2003) might ultimately emerge from the employee. For instance, it might appear that the unfavourable behaviour is caused by personal problems that are relevant to the work context, and challenges can be revealed where the leader may have a key role in finding the solution. In such a situation, the helping dynamics change, and the leader and the employee are in helping position 1, where the employee more or less explicitly asks the leader for help.

However, ethical dilemmas might arise from such situations. If, for instance, the leader encourages the employee to share personal experiences in order to have her realise that she needs to change her behaviour, and the information revealed by the employee forces the leader to take action in such a way that the employee feels tricked or hoodwinked, would not such use of coaching be ethically problematic? This will be further discussed in section 3.6 below.

In conclusion, it seems that if coaching leadership is to be understood from a helping perspective, the helping situation that is here characterised as helping position 1 is the foundational condition of the coaching process. In the following section, power issues related to coaching leadership will be discussed.

3.5. Mutuality and power issues in the leader-employee relationship

The helping relationship is by definition asymmetrical in the sense that the one person is dependent on the help of the other to realise something that she cannot realise on her own (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund, 1998). In the dialogue between Martin Buber and Carl Rogers in 1952 (Kirschenbaum, 1989), the question of mutuality in the helping relationship was a controversy between the two. In their debate, Buber suggests that helping processes are essentially about influencing people, and that the moment one person wishes to influence another the possibility of real mutuality and dialogue is obstructed (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989).

Similarly, the leader-employee relationship is considered asymmetrical in terms of the leader's principal possibility of employing, promoting and dismissing the employees, and of defining the working conditions (McCarthy & Milner, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2015). Through her appointed formal position the leader is in possession of what in the typology of French and Raven (1959) is called "legitimate power", where "*persons obey because they accept the other's right to decide*" (Strand, 2015, p.174, my translation). This asymmetry, however, differs from the asymmetry of the helping relationship between the professional coach and the coachee (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Alrø & Nilles, 2015). In the latter case, the coach is not responsible for the coachee in terms of her performance and productivity, but rather, in an ethical, helping perspective (Schein, 2009).

Furthermore, it is proposed that the "goal rationality" of the organisational context must be an implicit or explicit part of the communication between the leader and the employee: the fact that board members, stockholders and societal guidelines are strongly involved in setting the agenda must be an acknowledged and accepted condition of the interaction (Aschen & Dræby, 2004). In contrast, Achen & Dræby (2004) maintain that the *dialogue* must in principle be free of this goal rationality, and it is argued that this restrains the dialogue between the leader and the employee because it creates an asymmetrical relationship between the two that is fundamentally different from that of peers (Aschen & Dræby, 2004). In this sense, coaching leadership should be distinguished from the "professional dialogue" between peers that is aimed at the mutual development in relation to one another (Simonchini, Lasen, & Rocco, 2014). Although peers communicate within the organisational context and are, in a sense, bound by its goal rationality, the one has no more

responsibility or formal power in relation to the other, and the dialogue might be established on more symmetrical grounds (Aschen & Dræby, 2004). In other words, the possibility of dialogue and mutuality is limited due to the leader's direct involvement in the employee's working context and her responsibility for the employee's performance (McCarthy & Milner, 2013), as discussed in section 3.2.1 above.

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, in spite of the inherent asymmetry of the helping relationship, mutuality is believed to be a possibility (Kvalsund, 1998, 2005a; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). It has been argued that mutuality might arise in a relationship where both dependency and independency are transcended so that a situation of interdependency can be created (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). It has been suggested that when the coach and coachee are eventually enabled to transcend from dependency, via independency, into an interdependent way of relating to one another, mutuality and true dialogue can occur (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). This does not mean that once a relationship has transcended into interdependence, mutuality is achieved once and for all, as noted in Chapter 2. Interdependence means that both parties in the relationship are interested in maintaining both their own and the other person's *independence* while also aiming to transcend this independence by trying to understand the other person's perspective and lifeworld (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Paradoxically, this involves both transcending and holding on to what is transcended (Kvalsund, 1998). Such an experience of interdependence might arise in moments and phases of the relationship where contact is achieved but is replaced by other relationship forms where one withdraws for a moment or for longer periods of time (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

Interdependence as understood from the perspective of the transformative dialogue involves and requires more than merely being dependent on each other at an operational, transactional level. The leader and the employee essentially depend on each other by virtue of their formal roles. The leader depends on the willingness of the employee to cooperate in reaching organisational goals, whereas the employee, on the other hand, depends on the leader's willingness and possibility to maintain her position, pay her salary and determine acceptable working conditions (Pedersen et al., 2015; Storeng et al., 2006). In this sense, the two depend on each other on a formal external level.

A relationship can be characterised as “internal” or “external” (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003). In this terminology, every leader-employee relationship is in principle external in terms of the formal rules and guidelines regulating the formal dynamics of the relationship. However, it also has the potential, like any other relationship, to develop into an internal relationship. The concept of interdependency that has been presented in the previous chapter requires an internal relationship (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003).

In this perspective, it might be argued that the possibility of mutuality and interdependency exists in the leader-employee relationship as much as in any other human relationship when it comes to moments and phases of contact and dialogue (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). However, this requires a trustful, *internal* relationship in which both parties are willing to let themselves be influenced and transformed by the other person (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). This implies that not only must the leader open up for the “otherness” of the employee, but this must also be seen the other way around: the employee must be genuinely interested in the leader. Interdependency and mutuality form a two-way process (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008).

As shown above, the interdependency dimension involves mutuality in the sense that the relationship becomes two-sided. It has been suggested that a true dialogue is defined by the two persons’ genuine interest in each other (Friedman, 1992; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). This dialogue involves both influencing and letting oneself be influenced by the other (Friedman, 1992), which means being open to letting oneself to be transformed by the “otherness” of the other person (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). In the dialogue, the interlocutors see each other as persons rather than objects: they are in an I-Thou relationship rather than an I-It relationship with each other (Buber, 1958/2000). The question of whether the mutuality aspect of coaching leadership as it appears in this study is too one-sided will be discussed in Chapter 6. In the following, the mutuality aspect of coaching leadership is further discussed in relation to the concept of “power reflective practice”.

3.5.1. Coaching leadership as power reflective practice

Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) suggest that coaching leadership can be understood as a “power reflective practice”. They use the power perspective of Foucault as a point of departure for understanding how the leader and the employee can engage in dialogues where power aspects of the relationship and the organisation are examined. This might in turn be a way of transcending the formal power aspects of the leader-employee relationship (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Some basic ideas of the Foucauldian understanding of power are therefore introduced in the following to inspire further discussion.

In the power perspective promoted by Foucault (1972) power is seen as an omnipresent, dynamic force operating in all kinds of relationships and on all societal levels (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). The unilateral idea of power being executed by the powerful over the powerless is thus rejected (Assarsson & Sipos Zackrisson, 2005). Furthermore, power is regarded as an inevitable and fundamental condition of human interaction that operates in the most local practice and the most private relationship (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). It has no centre, but rather exists in the space between people: it is relational (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). It is distributed, rather than attached to specific positions, contexts, practices or institutions (Aarsand, 2011).

Bearing this in mind, power does not possess inherent qualities, it is not good or bad in itself (Ahl, 2008; Assarsson Aarsand 2011). A leader might exert power in relation to her employee by giving positive feedback, inasmuch as she might exercise power by ignoring or reprimanding her. A lit match can create warmth, light and a cosy atmosphere by lighting a bonfire or a candle, but it might also set fire to an inhabited house and create disaster.

Furthermore, power is never neutral, it is productive in that it creates discourses and subject identities (Ahl, 2008). A discourse can be defined as “*a group of claims, ideas and terminologies that are historically and socially specific and that create truth effects*” (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1999, p. 49, as cited in Ahl, 2004). Discourses create and regulate norms of behaviour in terms of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable, desirable and undesirable, normal or abnormal. They are produced, selected, organised, controlled and redistributed according to certain practices that “*dictate what can be said and what cannot, by whom and through what means*” (Ahl, 2008, p. 154). Furthermore, discourses are culture-, practice- and

context-specific. For instance, a teacher cannot take off her clothes in the classroom without experiencing social or formal consequences, but she might do so at home whilst in the role of mother or partner. A child who rages in the setting of the classroom might be labelled an “abnormal” or “antisocial” pupil, whereas at home such behaviour might be considered a sound part of the process of independence and individualisation.

Hence, power is a relational activity in which every individual participates. It is upheld by the social order where the individual is watched over, judged and defined by other individuals, but, more importantly, also by herself (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). In specific contexts, patterns emerge as to which actions, ideas and expressions are preferred, and these patterns *govern*, that is, they shape people’s actions, meaning-creating and ways of talking (Assarsson Aarsand, 2011). However, these patterns do not exist outside or independent of the individuals who are governed by them, but rather they are also made and maintained by the individuals themselves (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007).

The “power-reflective practice” promoted by Schnoor & Haslebo (2007) involves that the employee is invited to reflect on power relations and discourses in the organisation. It is further suggested that the employee is encouraged to reflect on prevailing discourses in the organisation, and on how she influences or is influenced by them, she becomes a “moral party” (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). Discourses are deconstructed and critically examined, the leader and the employee can illuminate such things as the organisational culture from a critical perspective, and the employee might say, for example: *“At this workplace people seem to value the idea of being inundated with work, and if you do not seem stressed, you are not considered to be doing a good job. I’m not so sure whether I want to be a part of such a work climate”*. The leader who allows such statements to come to the fore by suggesting power issues in the organisation as the theme of the conversation may be considered willing to let the discourses and narratives about the organisation be critically examined (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). However, as will be argued in section 3.5.2 below, inviting to such conversations requires relational competence and ethical sensitivity on the part of the leader.

Furthermore, the power reflective practice takes its point of departure in narrative thinking, inspired by Michael White (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) propose that our lived experience is organised into narratives

which we use to understand ourselves and what happens to us. The narrative is confirmed and re-confirmed by our selective perception, we choose to integrate what confirms the narrative, and it is suggested that this tendency limits our possibilities to take action (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007).

A similar understanding might be found in Rogers' (1951/2003) concept of "self-structure selection". The self only integrates what does not appear to be threatening to its existence. Through the process of organismic evaluation described in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1, experiences that feel good and non-threatening to the organism might be judged as negative and rejected from the threatened self-structure, whereas experiences that are evaluated as positive for the self-concept are selected and integrated into the self-structure (Kvalsund, 2003a). Turning back to the example of the child, also introduced in section 2.3.1, if the child admits to herself that it feels good to hit her little sister, this experience is in conflict with her self-concept as lovable, and this experience is therefore rejected from her self-structure. Similarly, according to White (2002), we tend to internalise predominant and culturally determined discourses and let them speak the truth about our identity, and are thus blinded to the possibilities we could have been given by searching for alternative truths about our lives (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007).

3.5.1.1. Power reflective, power free or power based?

The idea of the power reflective practice is contrasted by Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) with two qualitatively different positions identified by the authors in which coaching leadership is regarded as a "power-free" space and a "power-based" space, respectively. They suggest that both these stances might be understood from a traditional power perspective in which power is something the leader "has" by virtue of her decision-making authority. However, the term "power-free" itself does not make sense in the Foucauldian understanding of power where power is regarded as an omnipresent force (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). The authors propose that in the "power-free" ideal of coaching leadership it is assumed that the coaching leader must take her leader's hat off, to use a metaphor, so she can enter a coaching dialogue with her employees.

According to this perspective, the leader lets her leader responsibilities move to the background and enters a more facilitative role where the focus is on exploring the life-world of the employee in a shared reflective space where the employee might

relate to issues within her work context without risking sanctions, control and reprimand (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). Molly-Søholm et al. (2013) indirectly criticise the idea of a “power-free” perspective when they posit that the leader can never in her role of leader put these aspects of the leader-employee relationship aside. She can never take her leader “hat” off, but must at all times be clear about her role as a leader. In the leader-employee relationship, she is primarily the leader, and in this position she can integrate coaching into her approach to the employees. This means that the “production domain” (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007) is the primary context of coaching, in other words, the organisational agenda and the coaching agenda are interrelated. The employee’s wishes, intentions and goals are addressed and the task of the leader is to ensure that these are achieved. In such a perspective the coaching conversation is designed to: “*create results in the areas in which the success criteria of the organisation are defined*” (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013, p. 22, my translation). This entails a normative element where solutions might be more or less adequate in relation to the professional organisational context, and such a perspective is, by Schnoor and Haslebo, (2007) associated with a “power based” understanding of coaching leadership.

3.5.2. Coaching leadership – a hat to be taken on and off?

From the perspective of the power reflective practice it would appear that coaching is an activity which the leader clearly and preferably explicitly enters and exits according to the possibility of sharing an open, reflective space where the pursuit of organisational goals is temporarily set aside (Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007). In such a perspective, a question might arise as to whether conversations of this kind are likely to take place in leadership practice: what would be the motivation to spend time and energy on conversations that are not directly related to the work that is to be done and the goals that are to be reached?

It might be argued that by exploring values and existential themes one may gain insight that can indirectly influence the work processes (Joseph, 2014; Stelter, 2013). For instance, an exploration of the relationship between the leader and the employee as such might be an example of a power-reflective dialogue. If a leader asks her employee how she feels about the interaction and relationship with her, or the other way around, the leader and the employee examine the power dynamics of the relationship and reflect on prevailing discourses in the organisation, this might in turn

provide valuable information about how work processes can be more adequately arranged in the future.

It must be noted, however, that asking the employee such a question requires ethical sensitivity and commitment (Anderson & Handelsman, 2010). If a leader asks the employee to be open and honest about how she feels about their relationship, she must be prepared to receive the feedback that lies in the answer from the employee (Hennestad, Revang & Strønen, 2012). If, for instance, the employee replies by criticising the leader, and the leader responds by ignoring the employee the next time the two meet by the coffee machine, such power reflective practice might contribute to reinforcing the asymmetrical relationship between the two rather than being a way of reducing the hierarchical space (Anderson, 2013). In the terminology of Macmurray (1961/1999), the contact between the two is broken and withdrawal is a fact (Kvalsund, 1998). The internal relationship between the two is at stake (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003). The consequences could, however, also be the opposite: the asymmetry that lies in the external, formal relationship between the leader and the employee (McCarthy & Milner, 2013) might be diminished as a consequence of the employee's questioning of the leader's competence. The point to be made here is that inviting such power reflective practice requires relational skills and ethical sensitivity on the part of the leader.

From the perspective of the power reflective practice, coaching conversations are ultimately about challenging the employee to become a "moral party" by creating and re-creating narratives about herself in the work context, rather than being passively inscribed in the existing discourses in the organisation. The production domain in which goals are defined and action plans are agreed upon is thus not considered part of the coaching endeavour from such a stance. Due to her involvedness in the work processes of the organisation, and her ultimate responsibility in all the work processes of her employees, Stelter (2013) cautions that the leader's self-interest impedes her opportunity to take a coaching approach when the issues in question are directly linked to these work processes.

A way of resolving this dilemma might be to reserve coaching in the work context for situations that are not directly linked to the production domain. This could be done by not having the work processes as the primary context of the conversation, but by letting these processes move to the background and examining more existential or overriding themes that might in turn indirectly concern and influence the work

processes (Joseph, 2014; Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007; Stelter, 2013). Coaching within leadership becomes, in such a perspective, a limited part of what a leader does, something that is reserved for the spaces within leadership where the leader and the employee might “leave” the production domain for a moment and interact in a more open dialogue in which the formal power aspect and the issue of responsibility and involvedness are less persistent.

Another seemingly radically different way of looking at the leader’s self-interest and involvedness in the work processes and performance of the employee in relation to coaching leadership is proposed by Molly-Søholm & Molly (2013). They suggest that “*when one coaches as a leader, one must coach as a leader*” (p. 15, my translation). In the leadership context, the leader cannot at any time escape or suspend her role as a leader, however, bearing this in mind, she might utilise coaching as an approach among other approaches for achieving the goals of the organisation. Coaching is not the context in which leadership is implemented, rather one must look at this the other way around: leadership is the context into which coaching is imported, and the coaching concept must therefore be adjusted so it is applicable to this specific context. This is the rationale behind the term “leadership-based coaching”, which in this thesis is considered more adequate than, for instance, the term “coaching-based leadership” (Moen & Federici, 2012; Moen & Skaalvik, 2009), as mentioned in section 3.1.1 above.

One can question whether these views are as different as they might seem. Both the perspective suggested by Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) and Stelter (2013), on the one hand, and by Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013), on the other hand, seem to more or less explicitly incorporate the understanding that coaching cannot stand alone in explaining what a leader does, or prescribing what she should do. Coaching in the leader context must be juxtaposed with other approaches. For instance, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) maintain that the coaching leader sometimes “*exits the coach role*” (p. 20, my translation) to provide feedback and clarify demands and expectations, rules, frames and goals. This implies that the interventions just listed are not included in the coaching leadership concept. In other words, when the leader gives feedback to the employee, for instance, she is no longer the coach. However, it seems that, for Stelter (2013) and Schnoor and Haslebo (2007), the leader must in some way or another suspend, or step out of her role as leader to render coaching within leadership possible.

As noted in the introduction, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) characterise “leadership-based coaching” as a “leadership form”. It seems that in a sense, coaching pervades leadership, although it is juxtaposed with other approaches, such as giving feedback. Whereas Stelter (2013) and Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) reserve coaching for moments within leadership in which the leader can let her leader role and responsibilities move to the background, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) seem to propose that coaching must be regarded as part of the leaders’ process of reaching organisational goals. Concurring with O’Neill (2007), Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) suggest that the leader might give feedback or communicate performance expectations, and then a conversation might unfold in which the leader can “put her coaching hat on” (although still “keeping her leader hat on”, metaphorically speaking) and, for instance, explore the employee’s feelings and reflections in relation to the communicated feedback and performance expectations.

All in all, the controversy seems to be about whether or not the coaching conversation can be directly linked to the work processes. Molly-Søholm & Molly (2013) seem to posit that the leader must, at all times, “wear her leader hat” and that coaching leadership takes place in conversations where one directly addresses the work processes of the organisation. For other scholars, for example Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) and Stelter (2013), it seems that coaching leadership only becomes a possibility when the work processes can move to the background. For Schnoor and Haslebo (2007), this can happen in the power reflective practice, whereas for Stelter (2013), it can occur when more existential issues are being addressed and discussed and the leader’s self-interest related to the production domain is put aside.

3.5.3. A perspective on coaching leadership that promotes mutuality?

Stelter (2013) maintains that due to the leader’s “*unique power position and authority*” an external coach is preferable to a coaching leader (p. 131). This is also promoted by the findings of Moen & Skaalvik (2009), who conclude that external coaches are more effective than coaching leaders. However, in the case of the coaching leader, Stelter (2013) suggests that what he calls “third-generation coaching” provides a theoretical framework, which is better suited for the leadership context than, for instance, “first-generation coaching”. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the latter draws, according to Stelter (2013, 2014a) on principles of psychodynamic, cognitive and behavioural theories, as well as the GROW model and NLP, whereas

the former involves more constructivist-oriented directions, such as narrative, narrative-constructive and protreptical/philosophical perspectives. By taking the third-generation perspective on coaching leadership, Stelter (2013) argues that the possibility is there to create a collaborative dialogue within the leader-employee relationship. When the leader coaches from this perspective: *“the ultimate goal is to alleviate and enhance leadership, communication and cooperation, not by focusing on specific goals, but by reflecting on key values as points of orientation in cooperation and organisational development”* (Stelter, 2013, p. 134, my translation). In other words, the conversation is not goal-oriented, but focuses on the ground on which one stands, the basis of organisational processes.

For Stelter (2013), the indirect rather than direct focus on specific goals seems to be what justifies and promotes the third-generation approach to coaching leadership. In contrast to this, Joseph (2014) argues that for the same reason, an existential-humanistic perspective, such as person-centred coaching, might not be the best suited framework if the aim is to understand and explain coaching leadership. He argues that more goal- and performance-oriented perspectives on coaching serve better for understanding coaching in the leadership context (Palmer & Whybrow, 2008). Similarly, Spinelli and Horner (2008) argue that existential coaching might entail a certain ambiguity, and it is therefore suggested that this framework might be less suitable in contexts where the aim is to *“seek certainty”*, and there is a *“wish to use coaching to drive towards a fixed outcome”* (Spinelli & Horner, 2008, p. 126). In the organisational context, it has been shown that leadership is about influencing people towards a common goal (Northouse, 2007; Yukl, 2010), which might be understood as the kind of “fixed outcome” referred to by Spinelli and Horner (2008). According to these authors the pursuit of organisational goals does not seem to be compatible with a more existential exploratory approach to coaching. Scholars such as Stelter (2013) and Schnoor and Haslebo (2007) seem to resolve this dilemma by reserving coaching for conversations in which the pursuit of goals is not predominant, but rather, has a more implicit character.

However, it might be argued that leading people towards a fixed outcome is problematic in relation to any coaching orientation. There seems to be a common understanding in the coaching field that coaching is about facilitating the developmental process of the coachee, which implies helping her to find her own resources, goals and solutions (Cox, Bachirova & Clutterbuck, 2014; Palmer &

Whybrow, 2008). Bearing this in mind, coaching does not, in its nature, seem compatible with the leadership context where the leader's primary task is to lead the employees towards a fixed outcome (Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2010).

The strength of the existential-humanistic approach is its focus on creating relational conditions for growth and development (Ivey et al., 2012). It can be argued that the emphasis on the attitude of the helper as the cornerstone of a facilitative environment (Rogers, 1961/2004), more so than specific methods and techniques (Allan & Whybrow, 2008), makes it open to any social context. In this respect, Rogers (1961/2004) proposes: *"If the administrator, or military or industrial leader creates such a climate within his organization, then his staff will become more self-responsible, more creative, better able to adapt to new problems, more basically cooperative"* (p. 37). Similar assumptions underpin this thesis. Adapting coaching principles anchored in existential-humanistic thinking into coaching leadership primarily implies a view of the employee as a capable and self-directive human being worthy of respect, love and care (Buber, 1958/2000; Rogers, 1961/2004).

Furthermore, it involves an "attitude of helpfulness" (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002) that implies being attentive to the needs of the employee according to her overall process of growth and development and in relation to specific work-related issues. Being attentive involves asking questions, listening and checking things out (Ivey et al, 1998, Moen & Kvalsund, 2008), not taking for granted that one knows things about the other person that have not been revealed by the person herself (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

Returning to the question of mutuality, it can be concluded that mutuality is a possibility in the internal relationship (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003) between the leader and the employee, just as it is possible in any other relationship, in spite of various forms of asymmetry, as argued in section 3.5 above. As also mentioned in section 3.5, mutuality, understood as interdependency cannot be achieved once and for all, rather it occurs in phases and moments of the relationship, but it presupposes both parties' willingness and openness to allow oneself to be influenced by the other person without having to relinquish one's independence (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008).

Anderson (2013) proposes that coaching leadership is about accepting and emphasising the *"relational and social constructivist feature of leadership processes where the hierarchical space between leaders and followers is diminished, and the potential for growth, development, challenge and change to both parties involved in*

the process is acknowledged” (p. 261). A dimension of mutuality is promoted: in coaching leadership the leader strives to diminish the hierarchical space that could be accomplished by involving employees and being attentive to their needs. At the same time, Anderson (2013) underscores the reciprocity dimension of mutuality. If mutuality is to be achieved in the leader-employee relationship, the conditions for growth and development must be actualised for both parties. The mutuality dimension of the leader-employee relationship will be further addressed in Chapter 6 and it will be argued that, according to the findings of this study, this seems to be a still untapped potential of coaching leadership.

Power aspects of the leader-employee relationship have been explored here to discuss the possibility of mutuality in coaching leadership. In the following, ethical dimensions of coaching leadership will be addressed and discussed.

3.6. Ethical aspects of coaching leadership

One issue that has been addressed in relation to coaching leadership is the concern that leaders might end up in ethically problematic situations as a consequence of using a coaching approach. For instance, Ørjasæter, Larsen, and Stang (2015) ask: *“How can one be supportive at one moment, and achieve trust through listening and acceptance, and in the next moment, be the employer with the right and duty to lead and allocate work tasks?”* (p. 356, my translation). They suggest that ultimately leaders may obtain information about the employee through coaching conversations that could be used against the employee in a termination process. This seems like a worst-case scenario which is unlikely to happen in this way if the leader is aware of the ethical responsibility associated with coaching, as understood from an existential-humanistic perspective (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). This is not to say that the situation itself is not ethically complex, or that resolving the situation in an ethically responsible way is easy and straightforward.

The situation itself might, however, occur as a consequence of a coaching approach: when the leader starts asking questions and listens in such a way that the employee feels that she has been attended to and understood, she might be encouraged to share information about herself that the leader had not expected, upon which, by virtue of her role, the leader is obliged to act. As extreme examples, one might imagine an employee in the inland revenue service who reveals that she has cheated on her own tax returns due to economic problems, a nurse who says that she

has been stealing from the medicine supplies due to a drug problem or a bus driver who admits to an alcohol problem.

The dilemma might illustrate the problem of confidentiality, which is a core issue in coaching leadership (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). It has been argued that the leader-employee relationship might not and probably should not be like the confidential space offered by the external, professional coach (Anderson et al., 2009; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) suggest that in clarifying the conditions of coaching the leader should communicate that the coaching conversations are not taking place in a confidential setting, but rather information shared will be transferred to and treated in relation to the work processes. With such agreed upon conditions, dilemmas such as the ones described above might be avoided, because the employee is more careful about the information she shares with her leader. The ethical problem associated with coaching leadership, as taken to the extreme by Ørjaseter et al. (2015) above, arises if the employee believes that the coaching space is confidential and thus is “tricked” into revealing information that is then used against her, as in the example in section 3.5.2 above. In Chapter 6, such dilemmas will be discussed in relation to the informal coaching approach that appears to be the most predominant expression of coaching leadership promoted by the findings of this study.

The question arises, however, as to whether there could be ways of resolving this kind of dilemmas where the trust achieved in the relationship between the leader and the employee is not broken. Is it possible for the leader to handle such cases in an ethically responsible and adequate way? One might, for instance, imagine that if the leader remains attentive to the employee throughout the process, and communicates the dilemma in such a way that the two arrive at a common, mutual understanding of the situation, the risk that the employee feels betrayed might be reduced. If the leader is able to show an accepting attitude towards the employee as a person, while communicating at the same time that she cannot, as a leader, accept the actions or attitudes of the employee (Rogers, 1959), the risk of the situation becoming ethically problematic might be reduced. Again, this is not to suggest that there are simple solutions to such ethical dilemmas.

Another ethical dilemma might emerge, however, in relation to the idea of communicating clear division lines between work related issues and the personal and private domain in coaching leadership, as suggested by, for instance, Schnoor and

Haslebo, (2007) and Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013). From an existential-humanistic perspective, coaching involves more than discussing issues on the cognitive level: it involves the whole person (Whitworth et al., 2009), where the entirety of lived experience is explored, including cognitions, emotions and bodily responses. Here the work domain cannot be separated from other areas of life, rather they are interrelated and are all parts of the person's field (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). When the leader challenges the employee to explore her experience of work-related issues by asking questions, private issues might emerge. In the flow of communication, how can such themes be rejected, and what consequences could such rejections entail? Considering the hypothetical case described above, such situations might foster ethical dilemmas and challenges that also demand ethical sensitivity.

In the following, the humanistic imperative will be discussed in relation to coaching leadership.

3.6.1. Coaching leadership – means to an end?

In a commentary in the Danish newspaper "Information" on the 2 February, 2008²⁶, Mette-Line Thorup expresses concern that coaching leadership essentially is a covert means to achieving more efficiency and profit: "*Coaching is promoted as a humanistic leader strategy by which the employee is led (or seduced) into achieving specific goals*" (Thorup, 2008, 28.02, my translation). There are reasons to believe that the underlying purpose of realising potential or utilising resources (Whitmore, 2011) might contribute to leaders discovering the opportunity to use a coaching approach in order to create better performance on the individual level and thus achieve more efficiency and better results on the organisational level. As mentioned in section 3.1.2 above, the rise of globalisation, technological development and information flow has contributed to actualising the human-resources dimension of the organisation as a key competitive advantage (Becker & Gerhart, 1996). Recruiting, motivating and retaining the best employees and taking the most advantage possible of the existing group of employees has thus become an important leader task which demands new approaches to leadership (Herrera, 2010). It seems that coaching has been introduced as a response to the need for a more relational orientation to leadership (Beattie et al., 2014).

²⁶ See also Gortz (2008).

In an existential-humanistic perspective, the humanistic imperative is pervasive in the encounter between people: every person is worthy of respect, care and love by virtue of being a human being (Buber, 1958/2000; Løgstrup, 1971). In person-centred theory, this is manifested by the condition of acceptance, the unconditional positive regard for the client (Rogers, 1980/1995, 1961/2004). In the leadership context, the primary aim is to achieve the goals of the organisation (Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2010). If the leader uses coaching so the organisation is better equipped to reach its goals, is this endeavour itself unethical as indicated in the above quotation? It can be argued that if coaching leadership is reduced to a technique used to reach the goals of the organisation, without being embedded in humanistic values, it becomes inherently unethical in that the employees are reduced to *merely* being means to an end to achieve organisational goals. It might even be argued that such an endeavour should not be considered coaching, since coaching is inextricably connected to existential-humanistic values (Joseph, 2014). On the other hand, employees on all levels, including leaders, comprise the human resources of the organisation and are in a sense the most important means for reaching organisational ends (Becker & Gerhart, 1996). However, in a leadership where human resources are *merely* reduced to a means, it might be argued that such a leadership is unethical, whether called coaching leadership or not.

Perspectives and concepts presented in this chapter and Chapter 2 will be further discussed in Chapter 6 below in relation to the findings from the study.

3.7. Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed coaching leadership according to the existential-humanistic perspectives presented in the previous chapter. An understanding of leadership has been presented, followed by a discussion of the term coaching leadership in relation to managerial coaching. A perspective on the organisation has been outlined. Coaching leadership has been discussed in relation to external coaching, and an integral perspective on coaching leadership has been posited. The leader-employee relationship has been explored in a helping perspective, and issues of power and mutuality have been presented and discussed. In the conclusion of the chapter, ethical considerations in relation to coaching leadership have been addressed.

4. Methodology

In this section I will explain how and according to which principles the research process has been undertaken. A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach has been chosen to answer the research question “*How is coaching leadership experienced by leaders, and how does coaching influence leadership?*” This chapter begins with a presentation and discussion of phenomenological concepts that are important for this study and then examines how hermeneutical ideas challenge and develop these concepts. Reflections on the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the research will then be presented. The qualitative design of the study will be outlined, with further reflections on the role of the coaching course from which the informants have been recruited and the selection of the 20 informants, and a presentation of the informants. Issues of reflexivity and the role of the researcher will then be presented, followed by a description of the research methods used in this project: semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews. Reflections regarding the transcribing of the interviews, the presentation of excerpts from the interviews in the thesis and on ethical issues relating to this research will then be presented. The hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis procedure that has emerged in this project will be described, and in concluding the chapter, quality criteria for qualitative research will be discussed.

4.1. A phenomenological-hermeneutic approach

4.1.1. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a research method that has emerged from the ideas of Edmund Husserl (Smith et al., 2009; Sokolowski, 2008; Szklarski, 2009). He introduced a philosophy that challenged the scientific paradigm of his time, and which has had significant impact on science and philosophy (Sokolowski, 2008). Whereas science was principally oriented towards the explanation of objects and events in the world, the *meaning* of such objects and events was not emphasised (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). Husserl suggested a philosophical framework for understanding how such exploration of the essential meaning of phenomena could be undertaken (Sokolowski, 2008).

The aim of phenomenology is not to explore the meaning of objects in themselves because it is assumed that objects do not hold an inherent meaning, but

rather, the meaning manifests itself in the interplay between the experiencing subject: the human being and the object (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). This interplay is an intrinsic part of our intentionality: human consciousness is intentionally directed at objects (Sokolowski, 2008). Every thought, feeling, hope, dream or fear is “about” something: “*One does not just love, fear, see and dream, one loves a loved one, fears something fearful, sees an object and dreams about something*” (Zahavi, 1997, p. 21, my translation). As mentioned in Chapter 2, even when one feels nothing, this “nothingness” is an object of our consciousness, a phenomenon that can be explored and examined (Kvalsund, 2005a). Intentionality thus involves a certain “directedness” (Rasmussen, 1998; Zahavi, 1997), between the experiencing person and any object of our consciousness. In this “space” a “*meaning-creating interplay*” emerges (Szklański, 2009, p. 107, my translation). It is in this meaning-creating interaction that lived experience is to be found (van Manen, 1997; Smith et al., 2009).

A phenomenon is anything in the world from which human beings can gain an experience (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). For instance, the political events in Norway after WW II cannot be studied phenomenologically in themselves, but, the *experience* of living through such events, or the *experience of studying* such historical events, can be the focus of phenomenological research. It is thus the *lived* experience of these phenomena that is of interest in phenomenology (van Manen, 1997).

Furthermore, phenomenological research is about studying the *essential meaning* of a given phenomenon (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). This search for the essential meaning of phenomena must not be confused with the positivistic search for capturing the nature of objects in the world (Dowling, 2004), rather, the object of study in phenomenological research is the “*essence of the meaning itself*” (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2007, p. 146). For instance, whereas a marine biologist might study the anatomy of a fish or the whereabouts of a herring shoal, a phenomenologist might study the meaning of fishing or the experience of holding a wriggly fish in one’s hands. What is the experience of fishing like? What is the essential meaning of the experience of fishing without which this would not be the experience of fishing? Which characteristics must be present for the experience of fishing to remain the experience of fishing, and not, for instance, going for a walk by the sea? These might be examples of elementary questions in the phenomenologist search for the essential meaning of phenomena in the world. According to Lindseth

and Nordberg (2004) *“By raising and answering such questions we are able to investigate and discover what is invariable in all the variations of the phenomenon, i.e. its essential meaning, its ‘essence’”* (p. 146, authors’ brackets).

Husserl (1900/1970) expresses the fundamental idea of phenomenology as going *“back to the ‘things themselves’”* (p. 252, author’s brackets). This is not to be confused with an essentialist search for the representation of “things” or objects in the world (Fuenmayor, 1991). The “thing” referred to by Husserl is, on the contrary, the meaning of our experience as it is lived through and in its pre-reflective form (Dowling, 2007; Kleiman, 2004). However, paradoxically, it is through reflection and verbalisation that we might explore the meaning of a phenomenon. For instance, in a research interview, the informant is asked to reflect on and say something about how the phenomenon in question is experienced.

It has been suggested that reflection on lived experience is always in a sense retrospective: *“it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through”* (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). For instance, the moment one starts exploring one’s anger, the experience of anger changes (van Manen, 1997). The idea of direct introspection into our experience is thus problematized (Finlay, 2008; van Manen, 1997). Experience is not an entity that can be inspected as an object, like a stone examined by a geologist. On the contrary, *“it is changing, changeable and fluid”* (Varela & Shear, 1999, p. 14). Even within the same research interview, lived experience might be expressed in different and sometimes paradoxical ways by the same informant. However, the aim in grasping experience in its pre-reflective form is to try to refrain from pre-determining its meaning, but come as close as possible to experience as it is lived through. According to Moran (2000), *“explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within”* (p. 4). The purpose of understanding the meaning of phenomena “from within” might be actualised through the epoché and the phenomenological attitude as described below.

4.1.1.1. The phenomenological and the natural attitude – and the epoché

In the attempt to understand a given phenomenon as it is experienced, Husserl introduced the idea of phenomenological reduction, which requires a shift from the “natural attitude” to the “phenomenological attitude” (Dowling, 2004; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Sokolowski, 2008). In the natural attitude, phenomena are already interpreted and we have an intuitive feeling of what they mean to us (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). For instance, *being at work* is, for many people, an everyday experience that we do not question, we take its meaning for granted, it is what it is, and simply what we do. In the natural attitude we are, so to speak, soaked in our pre-understanding of the phenomenon, and this is how it must be. If we were to question everything that happened to us we would probably get nothing done, but more importantly, the world would not make sense to us. In our everyday life, the natural attitude helps us organise our experience (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

However, doing phenomenological research implies a shift from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude (Dowling, 2004; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Husserl therefore introduced the idea of “phenomenological reduction”, also called “epoché” (Beech, 1999). The meaning of epoché is to refrain from judgement or to avoid the everyday, commonplace way of perceiving things (Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This involves “bracketing”: putting prejudice, assumptions and pre-conceptions relating to the phenomenon within brackets (Dowling, 2004) and suspend our taken-for-granted-ness of the world. Smith et al. (2009) describe the epoché as “*stepping outside of our everyday experience (...) in order to be able to examine that everyday experience*” (p. 12). We shift our focus of attention from objects in the world to our experience of those objects (Smith et al., 2009).

Shifting from the natural to the phenomenological attitude involves a more radical change of experience than “*simply critically purifying oneself of bias and prejudices*” (Finlay, 2008, p. 6). It is not a merely reflective, cerebral process of identifying and becoming aware of bias, and then putting it aside. Rather, it involves experiencing the world in a fundamentally different way (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). A metaphor for this change might be the experience of taking sunglasses with a coloured filter off and all of a sudden seeing everything with “new eyes”. For instance, to understand the meaning of *being at work*, the preconceptions and taken-

for-granted-ness that determine our experience of being at work in our everyday life, according to the natural attitude, must be suspended if we are to arrive at a fundamentally different way of experiencing and exploring this phenomenon. The phenomenological attitude is thus the mode of phenomenological research, the way of experiencing in which experience itself can be explored (Smith et al., 2009; Sokolowski, 2008). When we, for instance, examine the experience of *being at work* from the stance of the phenomenological attitude, we might develop our understanding of what this experience is like, and thus we can be enabled to, for instance, improve our working conditions.

4.1.2. Hermeneutical phenomenology

Husserl's (1900/1970) concept of going "*back to the 'things themselves'*" (p. 252) and describing phenomena as objectively and precisely as possible has been criticised for adhering to a positivistic paradigm, and the idea of bracketing has also been problematized (Dowling, 2004, 2007; Finlay, 2008). For instance, Heidegger further developed this terminology by focusing on *understanding* the phenomenon, rather than *describing* it (Dowling, 2004, 2007; Finlay, 2008). Heidegger, influenced by Kierkegaard, brought existentialist philosophy into phenomenology (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2008). According to Heidegger, consciousness cannot be separated from our being, and thus understanding phenomena as they are lived becomes an existential rather than merely a cerebral endeavour (Dowling, 2007). He suggests that as humans we are embedded in our historical and cultural context, and asserts that prejudices, beliefs or biases cannot be put into brackets or suspended because these are fundamental elements of our being-in-the-world ("dasein") (Dowling, 2004; Finlay, 2008). Suspending our pre-understanding would therefore imply a detachment from our entire being.

Bearing this in mind, Heidegger introduced an interpretive, *hermeneutical* dimension to phenomenology, asserting that grasping lived experience is a fundamentally interpretive, reciprocal process (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2008). We influence the world and the world influences us. As expressed by Heidegger (1927/1962), "*Interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us*" (pp. 191-192). Understanding and interpretation are thus inherent parts of our human nature, constituting a process from which we cannot detach ourselves (Finlay, 2008). From this perspective, the idea of "pure" descriptions

is problematized. For instance, I might describe an action which I just observed as: “*she looked at him*” whereas someone else might describe the same action as: “*she scowled at him*”. Descriptions are dependent on language inasmuch as interpretations are intimately connected to language. Our prejudgements, our horizon of meaning, are an inevitable part of the “linguistic experience” that enables us to understand (Ray, 1994).

Gadamer took the interpretative, hermeneutic perspective on phenomenology further (Dowling, 2004, 2007). He suggests that our pre-understanding is the foundation on which we understand phenomena in the world, it forms our “horizon” of meaning (Dowling, 2004, 2007; Ray, 1994). Our pre-understanding is therefore a prerequisite for understanding. In an interactive meeting between two people, for instance in a research interview,²⁷ the horizon of meaning of the interviewer and that of the informant merge and a shared space arises in which new understanding and knowledge can arise (Dowling, 2004, 2007; Ray, 1994). However, as shown above, this does not mean that we should, as researchers, take this understanding for granted, as one would do in the natural attitude. On the contrary, it is the understanding, the meaning of lived experience itself that is the actual object of research, and which is questioned and illuminated through the phenomenological reduction (Smith et al., 2009). In Gadamer’s perspective, however, the dialogue between the researcher and the researched, the reader and the text, the interviewer and the informant, is emphasised: “*the horizon of the interpreter and the phenomenon being studied are combined together*” (Dowling, 2007, p. 134).

We project meaning onto a text and the text reveals its meaning to us (Smith et al., 2009). Meaning emerges, as mentioned above, in the space between the text and the reader, or more generally, in the interaction between the experiencing subject and the experienced phenomenon. Such a stance does not accept the idea that there is no meaning inherent in the text, but at the same time the idea of a single truth is rejected (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). In other words, the phenomenon or the text might have multiple but not infinite meanings (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009).

It is suggested that the pre-understanding itself cannot be put into brackets

²⁷ As two-focus-group interviews and 10 individual interviews have been conducted in this study (as will be described below), the examples used in exploring practical manifestations and implications of a phenomenological-hermeneutical approach are to a large degree related to the research interview.

because, in such a case, meaning would disappear (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). In the natural attitude we tend to judge and conclude and take the meaning of phenomena for granted (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). Shifting to the phenomenological attitude therefore does not imply suspending our entire pre-understanding, but rather, it is our judgements and conclusions, our “taken-for-grantedness” of the experienced phenomenon, that are put into brackets (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

Gadamer (1960/2013) maintains that a person who believes she is free of prejudice and bias will inevitably be determined by its power. For instance, a researcher who denies her preconceptions, relying instead on methodological objectivity, will unconsciously be dominated by her prejudices (Finlay, 2008). However, in order to deal with presuppositions regarding the meaning of the phenomenon being studied one must firstly make them overt, and render them as clear as possible (Dowling, 2007, p. 132). Dahlberg (2006) uses the concept of “bridling” as an alternative to the Husserlian concept of bracketing. Like a horse on the verge of galloping out of control but which is bridled by its rider, the researcher’s prejudice is bridled and thus prevented from getting out of control. In this instance, the “getting out of control” of the prejudice would mean that it remains unconscious and thus not likely to govern the researcher in obscure, unknown ways. Finlay (2008) warns about the “seductive power” of prejudice that is not made overt and taken into consideration, whereas van Manen (2007) cautions that such prejudice might “intoxicate” the research. According to Gadamer (1960/2013), we need to distinguish the prejudices that enable us to understand from those that make us misunderstand.

The phenomenological reduction is a complex and paradoxical on-going process that pervades research, where the researcher “takes a step back” from her initial pre-understandings to critically examine them (Finlay, 2008). When new insight, ideas and interpretations emerge, this pre-understanding is challenged “*and the ground is recovered*” (Finlay, 2008, p. 17). Phenomenological reduction is to be understood as an activity rather than a method, and a continuous process rather than a one-time event: “*It is a state of constant striving*” (Finlay, 2008, p. 17). It has been suggested that whereas in Husserlian phenomenology the researcher manages her pre-understanding by suspending or bracketing it, hermeneutical phenomenology, promoted by philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, asserts that we cannot escape from our historical embedded-ness in the world, and must

therefore accept and include our pre-understanding, so that its meaning can be examined and challenged (Finlay, 2008).

4.1.3. Ontological and epistemological reflections on this project

Issues of ontology and epistemology underpin any scientific endeavour, whether the researcher is aware of it or not (Scotland, 2012). While ontology is concerned with one's basic assumptions about reality and the world, epistemology revolves around beliefs about one's access to knowledge on this reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Høyer, 2011; Scotland, 2012). I will not aim, in this section, to give an account of the ontological and epistemological positioning of phenomenological-hermeneutical research per se. Based on my field of research, which is not philosophy of science, a contribution to a discussion on philosophy of science would be rather superficial and unsatisfactory. It seems that there is no single way of positioning and classifying research in terms of epistemological and ontological assumptions, and trying to position something as something, as if this something was "real" or "true" might, in itself, be an expression of an ontological and epistemological position that is far from my assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge.

I have therefore, in this section, chosen instead to reflect on my research position, not in terms of placing myself under one specific umbrella or "ism", but in reflecting on how the choices made in this research process can be seen as manifestations of my research position. It is assumed that what is of interest to the reader, bearing this in mind, is to be able to judge the coherence of the research (Tracy, 2010), that is, whether the choices made along the way are believed to point in the same epistemological and ontological direction.

4.1.3.1. Reflections on my research position

In trying to explain my research position, I find Høyer's (2011) account on ontology and epistemology helpful because it does not place the different positions into fixed frameworks or paradigms, nor does it claim to give an exhaustive overview of all possible scientific positions. Rather, it provides some clues as to how one can understand different research positions in relation to one another. Høyer (2011) distinguishes between two extremes that he calls "stable" and "floating" ontologies, admitting that the presentation is somewhat caricatured in order to distinguish the different positions from each other. In making this admission, the author points out

that little or no research can be said to exclusively rely on the one or the other extreme.

The “stable” ontology promotes an understanding of reality that believes in relatively stable connections between factors, regardless of varying contexts, and this involves an element of predictability (Høyer, 2011). The epistemological assumption of such an ontology is, according to the author, that in doing research, one assumes that the knowledge produced might allow for prediction of future events. In a “floating” ontology, on the other hand, one is more concerned with how different phenomena mutually influence each other (Høyer, 2011). Another way to express the difference between the two extremes is the dichotomy between, on the one hand, the aim at *explaining*, which is characteristic of research relying on a “stable” ontology, and on the other hand, the purpose of *understanding*, which might be descriptive of research relying on a “floating” ontology (Høyer, 2011). Furthermore, it is proposed that the more “floating” the ontology is, the more the research account is aimed at reflecting on how the researcher influences the researched and the research (Høyer, 2011).

A crucial assumption underlying the “floating” ontology is the belief that if a phenomenon had been investigated from a different perspective, by a different researcher, the results of the research would have been different. The “floating” ontology might, however, fall into the fallacy of rejecting any connections between phenomena in the world, and in this way make research itself redundant and irrelevant (Høyer, 2011). If one believes that there is any meaning in studying phenomena and doing research, one must also believe in some kind of stability, regularity and transferability of the produced knowledge (Høyer, 2011). Høyer (2011) therefore proposes a third position: the “changeable” ontology, where the researcher believes that research might to some degree “reflect” experience in the world, but at the same time, the researcher and the choices made in the research process are also believed to influence and thus contribute to creating the reality that one studies. In other words, this is a position that believes in a certain stability and regularity in the world, but also acknowledges a certain dynamic in this stability because it is assumed that “*We perceive the stability in different ways, but we do not live in different worlds*” (Høyer, 2011, p. 39, my translation).

In relation to the above categorisation, this research is believed to be positioned somewhere between the two extremes represented by the “stable” and the

“floating” ontologies and could, as such, also be described in terms of a “floating” ontology (Høyer, 2011). It is assumed that the knowledge produced regarding coaching leadership as a result of this research is not absolute, fixed or everlasting, as might have been the basic assumption if one adhered to a “stable” ontology (Høyer, 2011). On the contrary, it is believed to be dynamic, contextual and construed, as would be characteristic of a “floating” ontology (Høyer, 2011). In accordance with hermeneutical principles, the knowledge gained through this research is believed to emerge in a dynamic interplay between the researcher and the researched, between the text and the reader (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). This knowledge is, therefore, not believed to be a direct representation of reality, as would be characteristic of the “stable” ontology and the associated epistemology (Høyer, 2011).

This research is not, as such, concerned with ontological issues discussing whether there exists an “objective” reality or not. I do not, neither as a researcher nor as a person question, for instance, whether the dandelion by the path along which I am walking is real or not. However, I believe that it is through my subjective experience that I can perceive, explore or gain knowledge about this flower. It is through human consciousness that objects in the world might be understood (van Manen, 1997). As mentioned above, phenomenological-hermeneutic research is not concerned with studying and explaining the nature of objects in the world, but rather in investigating the subjective experience and *meaning* of these objects (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). In other words, I do not, as a researcher, question whether an objective reality exists, but acknowledge that it is only through consciousness that I can, as a human being, gain access to this reality (van Manen, 1997) as something that can be communicated and discussed intersubjectively.

4.1.3.2. Implications for the knowledge claims of this research

What does this, then, mean in relation to the study of the phenomenon coaching leadership? I do not believe that there exists a truth about coaching leadership, and acknowledge that the term itself is a construction. When this study aims at understanding more about the essential meaning of the experience of coaching leadership from the perspective of the leaders, this does not mean that I believe that an essence of coaching leadership exists irrespective of the leaders in this study and their unique experiences. The categories and subcategories that will be presented in Chapter 5 must not be understood as fixed, stable universal entities that point at the

essence of the experience of coaching leadership as if this was “something” in its own right. The essential meaning of the experience of coaching leadership as it appears in the categorical system in this study must rather be seen as a construction that has emerged as a result of a meeting between the data and the tools that I have at my disposal and have chosen to use.

Does this mean that the results of the study, the produced knowledge, have infinite possible variations? Does it imply that “anything goes”: could I have construed infinite category systems on the basis of this data? No. The category structure presented in Chapter 5 has been produced, as will be shown later in the present chapter, through a long and painstaking process of experimenting and probing arguments. This structure is believed to be the most “true”, reasonable or adequate picture of the essential meaning of the experience of coaching leadership that I have, as a researcher, managed to construct according to the research question and the theoretical perspectives I have chosen.

Furthermore, it is assumed that the knowledge gained about the phenomenon studied here must be understood in light of the context in which it is created (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005). This is why I have tried to be as clear and transparent as possible about choices made and positions taken along the way (Tracy, 2010). It is believed that the more the reader knows about how the knowledge is construed, the easier the reader’s process of determining whether the researcher and the research is trustworthy or not (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005; Tracy, 2010). In other words, the knowledge produced is believed to be contextual in terms of emerging in an interaction between how the informants understand and express their experience and how the researcher makes sense of these expressions according to her perspective (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Smith et al., 2009).

At the same time, the informants “give voice” to the phenomenon, and they are “entitled” to do so because of their “first-person” experience (Stelter, 2010; Tønnesvang et al., 2013) of the phenomenon that one tries to understand (Dahlberg et al., 2001). The knowledge of the phenomenon must therefore be understood in relation to these particular informants, even though it is not their particular experience per se that is the object of the research, but the phenomenon about which the informants express their experience (Dahlberg et al., 2001).

This research position involves a pragmatic (Dewey, 1938/1997; Kvalsund, 2015b) understanding of knowledge (epistemology) in terms of being concerned with

the usefulness of the knowledge in given contexts rather than claiming that the knowledge gained is “true” irrespective of contexts. Knowledge is, from a pragmatic point of view, not “true” unless it is useful or meaningful for someone in a given context. Again, this points in the direction of a “floating”, rather than a “stable” ontology (Høyer, 2011). As will be further addressed in the section on transferability at the end of this chapter, the knowledge claims of the study are concerned with what can be learned (Flyvbjerg, 2006) from the experience of these particular leaders in their unique contexts, rather than what this type of knowledge might explain or predict (Høyer, 2011).

Key concepts of the research methodology and reflections on the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this research have thus been presented. In the section below, the research design of the project will be described. The design incorporates phenomenological-hermeneutical concepts in relation to this particular study, which will be addressed as the text unfolds.

4.2. A qualitative research design

Choosing a qualitative design implies searching for the complex and multifaceted dimensions of phenomena in the world (Creswell, 2013; Fejes & Thornberg, 2009; Silverman, 2006). Qualitative knowledge is constructed by exploring the perspectives of a relatively small number of participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Rather than random samples, which are used in quantitative survey studies, the qualitative study is based on purposive samples for which the researcher “handpicks” the informants according to their typicality, that is their ability to provide information about the phenomenon being studied (Cohen & Manion, 1994). However, it is crucial that an account is given for the selection criteria, as this will reinforce the transparency and thus the trustworthiness of the project (Tracy, 2010). The informants in this study have been “handpicked” from the participant lists of a specific coaching course that will be described at the start of this section. The selection of and contact with the informants and the group of informants will then be described. Issues of reflexivity and the role of the researcher will be discussed and the semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews will be presented along with the principle of crystallisation. Finally in this section the processing of transcriptions and presentation of excerpts from the interviews will be elaborated on.

4.2.1. Research preparation

4.2.1.1. The coaching course as a part of the research context

The coaching course is a part of the research context of this study in the sense that it serves as a recruitment arena and a common point of reference between me as the researcher and the informants in the individual interviews – and among the informants in the focus-group sessions. As pointed out in the introduction, this does not mean, however, that the present study is concerned with *what* the informants have learned in the coaching course as an objective of the research per se. Rather, the focal point is how the leaders experience coaching leadership in their everyday contexts as leaders. The course is in the background, rather than being in the foreground as an area of research in itself.

As also mentioned in the introduction, the course is provided by a private company in cooperation with a Norwegian university and consists of two three-day modules and one four-day module over the time span of four to five months. The course has been held for many years, and thus, many classes have completed the course over the years. The number of participants in the course varies from class to class but between ten and twenty is the normal amount. A dynamic between various pedagogical arenas characterises the course. Theoretical lectures are followed by reflection in groups or exercises in “triads”. In the triad sessions, the participants are divided into groups of three where they rotate between three roles: the coach, the coachee and the observer. Real-life issues are presented by the coachee, while the coach practices specific techniques presented and discussed in the previous lecture. Examples of such techniques are given in section 1.4.1 in the introduction. After the session, the observer comments on what he or she has observed, with a focus on the performance of the coach. During these sessions, the teachers circulate among the groups and give feedback. The triad constellations vary during the course.

At the beginning of the course, participants are divided into “base groups” which serve as arenas for sharing and discussing experiences. These base groups remain the same throughout the duration of the course. Furthermore, in the “plenary” group the participants sit in a circle and discuss issues facilitated by the teachers, where participants share their reflections and experiences. Another function of this plenary group is that coaching sessions are arranged where one of the participants is in the role of the coachee, sharing real-life issues with one of the teachers who models

the role of the coach. The remaining participants observe the session and are encouraged to give their feedback to the coach afterwards. During the last module of the course, voluntary participants take over the role of the coach in these sessions. Moreover, learning journals with systematic reflection on specific events are actively used as a tool for individual reflection, both during and between the modules.

Since it is particularly imperative in this research not to reveal the identity of the informants in order to protect a third party: the employees of the leaders in the study (see section 4.3.1 below) the theoretical curriculum of the course cannot be presented in its entirety, as also explained in the introduction. However, it should be noted that due to the pragmatic understanding of learning promoted in this thesis (Kvalsund, 2015b), both the curriculum and other documents that address the aims and purpose of the course are of little interest per se. The study explores coaching leadership as the leaders themselves experience it, primarily with respect to their work contexts, rather than looking into *what is learned* in relation to the *aim and purpose* of the course the leaders have taken.

The selection criteria and process will be explained in the following.

4.2.1.2. Selecting the informants

Three criteria have guided the selection of informants for this research:

1. Participation in the above-described coaching course
2. Being in a leadership position while attending the course
3. Experience with coaching leadership, from the leadership perspective

The first criterion, participation in the course, ensures a common point of reference for understanding coaching in the interviews, although it does not imply that the understanding of coaching is believed to be the same for all participants, only that it might contribute to facilitating the conversation. As clarified both in the previous section and in the introduction, the fact that the course serves as a common point of reference does not imply that the reader needs a “complete” insight into the course content since it is the experience of coaching leadership here-and-now in relation to the leaders’ every-day context that is the focus of the study, and not the coaching course as such.

The second selection criterion implies that the informants have a leadership position. Since I wanted to explore coaching leadership in relation to, for instance, the possible area of tension from having both an overall responsibility for production and results and then attending to the needs of each employee (Locke, 2003), I wanted the

leaders to have personnel responsibility, that is the formal responsibility of following up the employee in the daily working situation (Schjander & Østrem, 1987), as mentioned in the introduction. In this respect, I initially found it to be of importance that the informants had more than one direct report.²⁸ With a focus on relational aspects of coaching leadership, the experience of coaching leadership within different leader-employee relationships is of interest in this study.

This initial criterion is fulfilled by all the informants in the 10 individual interviews, but it is not completely met by the informants in the focus groups. While informing about the project and announcing the focus groups, the three selection criteria were made clear (see Appendices B and C), with a focus on personnel responsibility for more than one employee.²⁹ However, when the sessions had started it turned out that some of the participants in the group did not have any direct reports, neither at the time of the interview nor when they attended the coaching course. However, as shown in the table with information about the informants (Appendix D), all the informants have leadership experience, and it also turns out that they have all worked to some extent specifically within the area of following up employees, without necessarily having the formal personnel responsibility. I therefore chose not to be as restrictive about the personnel responsibility criterion and the number of direct reports as I had initially intended to be. I considered that as long as they had experience in following up and leading employees, this experience covered what I had been after at the outset. This illustrates the iterative dimension of the qualitative research process: unexpected changes and irregularities become small parts of the “quilt” which can metaphorically be understood as the product of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

The third criterion of selection was that the informants should have experience of coaching leadership. To explore the lived experience of a phenomenon there must be an experiencing subject (Smith et al., 2009). In this case, the lived experience of the phenomenon coaching leadership is the objective of the study, and I am interested

²⁸ Employee for whom the leader has personnel responsibility.

²⁹ As can be read in the two information documents (Appendices B and C), which were distributed before the first and the second focus-group sessions, this criterion has changed during the project. In the first letter, I called for leaders who had personnel responsibility for five persons or more. In the second letter, I called for leaders who had personnel responsibility for one person or more. This latter formulation was simply a syntax error and was only discovered after the fact. The formulation should have been “more than one person”. This change of criteria came to light because as the project unfolded, I realised that leaders who had only two direct reports could just as easily provide relevant information about different leader-employee relationships than those who had five or more. In spite of the error in syntax in the second letter, all the informants in the individual interviews have personnel responsibility for more than one person, none of them only for one person. In the focus groups this is different, a fact which will be further addressed and discussed below.

in exploring this experience from the leader perspective. The coaching course ensures to a large degree that the participants who are leaders have experience in the area of coaching leadership as every participant is required to carry out coaching conversations in the period between modules 1 and 2, which the leaders then reflect on in their learning journals, and on which the teachers then provide written feedback. However, it is not specified in the coaching course that the leaders should carry out these conversations with their *employees*. As such, it might be argued that this element is not sufficient for ensuring experience of coaching leadership. However, I have left this to be determined by the leaders themselves. If they felt that they had experience of coaching leadership and showed interest in participating in this research, I would not question this experience further.

In the information document that was e-mailed to the participants in the recruitment phase (Appendices B and C), an interest in all kinds of experiences – positive and negative – was emphasised, both with respect to the course in particular, and coaching leadership in general. Bearing this in mind, it was clearly stated that this project is not an evaluation of the coaching course. There might be numerous reasons, other than the experience of the coaching course, why the leaders have positive or negative experiences of coaching leadership, such as work culture, background and personal preferences. Therefore, positive or negative experiences might arise regardless the experience of the coaching course. This was emphasised as an underscoring of the fact that it is not the experience of the coaching course per se which is of interest here, but rather, the leaders' experience of coaching leadership in relation to their every-day contexts as leaders.

A fourth element, although not a selection criterion as such, was the aim to explore the lived experience of coaching leadership in a group of participants characterised by a certain degree of heterogeneity. Specifically, I wanted the leaders in the study to work for different companies so that a variation in work cultures might be represented. As shown in the presentation of the informants in Appendix D, and as further outlined in section 4.2.1.4 below, the principle of heterogeneity has been fulfilled in several ways in the group of informants.

4.2.1.3. Contacting and recruiting the informants

The informants have in part been recruited from my class in the coaching course, and in part from other classes in the same course. Because of my participation in the course, I already knew some of the informants before the interviews: those with whom I had participated. For this reason, it was imperative that I did not let my impressions, assumptions and pre-conceptions about the informants guide the selection process (see further reflections on this issue in the section 4.2.2 below). To ensure that none of the leaders were favoured according to my prejudices and pre-understanding about their capacities as coaching leaders based on what I had seen in the course, all the course participants in my class who matched the selection criteria were contacted after the course.

Recruiting informants to a research project involves gaining trust and credibility as a researcher (Tracy, 2010). In this project, the process of gaining – or not gaining – the trust of potential informants from my own class in the course is likely to have started from the moment we first met in the course setting. In the course, participants are encouraged to share personal issues in relation to the role of coachee in the exercise “triads” and to reflect on and discuss personal experience in various arenas. This might imply that the participants get to know each other on a personal level more quickly than in other social contexts.

Since developing coaching competence involves the ability to create trustful relationships (Alrø & Dauer Keller; Bluckert, 2005), it is also possible to believe that there could, in the course setting, have been special interest in and motivation for creating trustful relationships with other participants in the course. In other words, spending a total of ten days together in a course where every participant is encouraged to share personal experience, and where creating trusting relationships is one of the main aims, might have contributed to potential informants knowing me to a certain degree on the personal level and experiencing trust in the relationship with me. This might, again, have facilitated the process of recruiting informants to the project, compared to recruiting informants from a field where no one knows each other prior to recruitment. However, it could also have been the other way around, as will be further discussed in section 4.2.2.2 below. Likewise, I will also discuss how the fact that when interacting with some of the informants I appeared more as a teacher than a co-student might have had an impact on the research.

About six months after the course all the participants in my course class who matched the selection criteria were sent an e-mail with a formal request to participate in the research project (Appendix B). This document presented the project, ethical issues relating to confidentiality and storage of the data were addressed and the voluntary basis of participation and the possibility to withdraw from the project at any time before publication were pointed out (see also section 4.3.2 below). The overall response to this e-mail was positive. However, some of the leaders were concerned about a lack of time and proposed that I contact them at a later stage. One of them never responded, for unknown reasons, but this might possibly be linked to the trust issues outlined above. Even though I have no reason for believing so, it could be that this person did not feel comfortable with my personality or demeanour and therefore did not wish to be involved in a research project led by me in my capacity as a researcher. At any rate, some of my co-students ended up participating in the individual interviews, while the rest were recruited from other course classes. Further reflections on these issues will be presented in the reflexivity section below.

To meet more potential participants face-to-face and present my project and the request for them to participate in the study in person, I visited the first module of a later class in the course. In addition to presenting the study, I also served as a co-facilitator during the rest of the day, primarily in terms of giving feedback to the participants as they trained coaching skills in triads. This personal presence in the course context was motivated by my wish to create enthusiasm about the project and build trust with potential participants, which are considered to be crucial parts of the research process (Kvale & Brinkman, 2010; Tracy, 2010). In this instance it must be mentioned that the enthusiasm of the course teachers in relation to this research project has been an important factor in the recruitment of informants. For instance, during the course they informed the course participants about the two voluntary focus-group interviews and encouraged people to participate.³⁰ Reflections on how my role as co-student facing some of the informants versus facilitator/teacher facing others might have influenced the research are presented in section 4.2.2.2 below.

³⁰ The first focus-group session was arranged in the second module of a later class than the one I participated in. The second session was arranged in a three-day-course for people who had already been through the basic three-module course.

After the above-mentioned oral presentation of my project in the course setting, an e-mail was sent to all the participants in this course class with a formal request for their participation (Appendix B). The project was presented in more detail, a concrete request about joining the focus-group interview at a given time and place was made, and an additional request for participation in individual interviews at a later stage was also made. Appendix C shows the slightly modified information letter which was given to potential informants in the second focus group some months later. This process will be described further in the section about the focus group (4.2.2.) below. Reflections and considerations on the informants in the study will be presented in the following.

4.2.1.4. The informants

The informants of this project are presented in Appendix D with pseudonyms and anonymised personal details. This appendix has three tables: one for the individual interviews and one for each of the focus-group sessions. There are 26 names in total, although only 20 persons have participated in this study. This is because six of the informants participated in two settings: one participated in both focus groups, and five informants in the individual interviews also participated in one of the focus groups. However, for confidentiality reasons, which are further elaborated on in the ethics section below, each informant is given a pseudonym for each setting he or she appears in. As a hypothetical example, an informant named “Ellie” in the individual interview could be named “Amanda” in the focus group.

In the group of 20 informants there were four women and 16 men. One woman and nine men participated in the individual interviews. In the first focus group there were five men and one woman, and in the second focus group, three women and seven men participated. As shown in the table in appendix D, there is great variation when it comes to the leaders’ number of direct reports: not all of the informants had personnel responsibility or were in leader positions at the time of the course, as elaborated on in section 4.2.1.3 above.

Furthermore, the table shows that the informants are employed within a variety of disciplines and sectors. What it does not show, for confidentiality reasons, is that none of them work in the same workplace. Some work for the same corporation, but in different divisions that are geographically separated. In this sense they represent different work cultures. Moreover, the informants differ in terms of

professional education and leadership experience. Another element which is not shown in the table but which stands out in the interviews is that the informants' motivation for attending the course spans from those who were encouraged to participate by their leaders, to those who had searched for a long time in the polyphony of coaching courses offered and ended up choosing this particular one. This variety of conditions on which the leaders understand and experience coaching leadership is believed to enhance the multivocality and richness of the data (Tracy, 2010).

Ethical and epistemological dilemmas and issues regarding the presentation and representation of informants are outlined in the section 4.3.6 below, while in the following, the principle of reflexivity and the researcher role will be discussed.

4.2.2. Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the most important research tool (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Preparing this tool implies reflecting upon the role of the researcher and demonstrating methodological transparency in terms of being clear about how the data is collected, processed, analysed and interpreted (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Tracy, 2010). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), the research process has a tendency to appear as if it is a "black box" in the research report; everything that has happened between the beginning of the data collection and the completed report remains unknown to the reader. The researcher must demonstrate reflexivity about, for instance, methodological considerations in the process, about how such considerations are influenced by her perspective and about how her presence in the field, for instance the interview situation, might influence the constructed knowledge (Finlay, 2002).

The task of the researcher is, as understood in this project, not to report facts, or truths, but rather to actively construct interpretations and reflect on how they have arisen (Hertz, 1997). For this reason, the perspective of the researcher must be clarified: from which background has the analysis and interpretation emerged, and on what ground is it built? If such considerations are not made explicit, readers are left to make their own assumptions and draw their own conclusions about these issues, which impairs the quality of the study (Larsson, 2005). Pre-conceptions and pre-understanding must be made overt so the reader is able to critically examine and interrogate the background from which the analysis has emerged (Larsson, 2005).

The researcher must develop and maintain a reflexive state of mind throughout the research process, not only in terms of awareness about how her presence in the field influences the data, or how her interpretations are constructed, but also about the actual foundation of the research project: the questions asked and those ignored, the persons studied and those not studied (Finlay, 2002; Hertz, 1997). When such choices have been made visible, reflected on and accounted for in the process, the credibility of the study is enhanced (Tracy, 2010).

Reflexivity can be distinguished from reflection (Finlay, 2002). Whereas reflection is the act of making something an object of consciousness, reflexivity can be considered a continuous process: “*reflexivity taps into a more immediate, continuing, dynamic, and subjective self-awareness*” (Finlay, 2002, p. 533). It has been suggested that reflective analysis by means of language can probably not fully grasp the lived experience “*in its immediate manifestation*” (Finlay, 2002, p. 533), but the researcher might dynamically and dialectically move between awareness and experience in “*an on-going conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment*” (Hertz, 1997, p. viii).

Phenomenological-hermeneutical epistemology acknowledges how the researcher is embedded in history and culture (Finlay, 2008). The phenomenon is understood in different ways by different researchers because our entire being-in-the-world is brought into the encounter with the phenomenon (Finlay, 2008). Subjectivity thus comes to the fore as a prerequisite for any understanding, or construction of knowledge. Knowledge is constructed in dialectic interplay between the researcher’s preconceptions and interpretations and the descriptions and interpretations of the informants (Finlay, 2002). In the phenomenological sense, “tuning the instrument” of the research implies reflecting on one’s pre-understanding and prejudices in relation to the phenomenon (Dowling, 2004). Reflections on prejudices that have become visible in this research are given in the section on the phenomenological aspects of the interviews (4.2.3.3) below.

4.2.2.1. The challenge of “openness” in this project

Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2001) use the concept of “openness”, which involves the ability to be surprised, and a “vigilance” which allows for the unexpected and unpredicted to emerge. In the preparation for the interviews, questions were asked as to what I expected the informants to say. According to my own experience as a leader, my basic curiosity in this project is connected to an experienced discrepancy between coaching and leadership, as shown in the introduction. A working hypothesis arose: I expected the leaders in this study to experience frustration and friction related to this gap. The study’s findings show such tendencies, but the main impression points in a different direction: the leaders express an integrative experience where coaching is brought into the leadership context in a seemingly more frictionless way than expected. This finding might show that this initial prejudice has not influenced the results in terms of a selective interpretation, where only the data confirming the hypothesis have been analysed.

However, this bias might have influenced the analysis in terms of the integrative experience expressed by the leaders functioning as a rejection or falsification of the initial hypothesis. Maintaining openness and the ability to be surprised has been a challenging process, and the ability to discover variations and multivocality in the data has been developed as a result of a continuous process of questioning and examining initial and emergent “hypotheses” in cooperation with supervisors, colleagues and peers.

Another experienced challenge related to the openness that is required of the phenomenological researcher (Dahlberg et al., 2001), is that, awkward as it might sound, it took time for me to transcend my experience that some of the informants had not understood what coaching was about. In relation to the ontological extremes presented in sections 4.1.3 and 4.1.3.3 above, one might say that I adhered to a certain degree to a “stable” ontology (Høyer, 2011) by believing that there might be a “truth” about coaching leadership that could be more or less known, understood or discovered. The working title of this project in an early phase, *Coaching leadership – “everybody” is talking about it, but what is it really?* (see appendix B) could as well reflect such a stance: an idea that coaching leadership is something in its own right that exists independent of our constructions of it.

Developing curiosity and wonder as to the leaders' experience of coaching leadership – whatever it was like, and whatever understanding of coaching it reflected – has been a process with several stages. As noted in the introduction and in section 4.2.1.1 above, the theoretical framework of the coaching course can be said to have an existential-humanistic orientation with elements of both gestalt principles and phenomenology,³¹ and hence, it has significant similarities with the theoretical framework in this study. These commonalities in the basic understanding of coaching promoted in this thesis and the theoretical grounds suggested in the coaching course might have prevented me from thinking critically about the coaching discourse that emerges in the course setting, and might therefore have contributed to introducing a certain normativity in my thinking, in an early phase, about how the coaching concept should be understood.

The question arises as to whether this prejudice would have been “blinding” to the same extent if we had been through a common coaching course in which I did not necessarily agree with the basic ideas of coaching presented by the teachers. In such a case I might have been more sceptical and critical to the understanding of coaching promoted by the informants in the interview. It could be that this kind of prejudice would have been more obvious and easier to detect in such a case. However, this does not mean that it would have been more easily overcome. In both scenarios, the normativity as to how I think coaching should be understood is problematic in relation to the research. The similarities in the theoretical foundation for coaching promoted in the coaching course and the basic understanding suggested in this thesis thus do not seem to be problematic in themselves, rather the way in which they might have contributed to blinding my researcher gaze in parts of the research process is problematic and must be addressed.

Again, these reflections might lead the reader to believe that the *content* of the course is of relevance to this research and thus, that the course curriculum should be exposed in its entirety so that the reader can judge for herself whether there are similarities between the course curriculum and the theoretical foundation for this

³¹ As clarified in the introduction, it must be pointed out here that these conclusions are not based on a systematic analysis of the curriculum of the course, but rather, they are based on my general impression after having participated in the course. As a participant, I read the formal documents related to the course and the curriculum literature, and it is from this perspective that the above reflections are made.

thesis. Here, it must be pointed out that the question of whether the informants, in my opinion, had “understood” what coaching is, or not, and whether their understanding was compatible with my understanding of coaching, or not, might not have been as much of an issue if the course had not been a part of the study. If the leaders had been recruited on the basis of their participation in a variety of different courses, or had not participated in any coaching or coaching leadership course at all, I might as well have judged or evaluated their perspective on coaching and coaching leadership as less developed, mature or adequate than mine at this stage of the process. The reason why this became an issue is believed to be because of my immaturity as a researcher, not because the informants’ understanding of coaching in relation to the aim of the course ever was, or is, a focal point of the study.

The point here is that it took time for me to realise that my implicit epistemology was not, at this stage, in accordance with the explicit epistemological aim and purpose of the study. This created frustration and tension, until I realised that the leaders’ perspectives on coaching and coaching leadership communicated in the interviews were not to be *evaluated* in terms of their validity in relation to a specific understanding of coaching and coaching leadership, but rather, the meaning of the experience of coaching leadership was to be explored from the perspective and lifeworld of the leaders (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004), in order to then be discussed and interpreted in relation to the theoretical perspectives that this thesis rests on, which is done in Chapter 6.

4.2.2.2. Reflections on my participation in the coaching course

I took the course as an “ordinary” participant, that is, on the same conditions as every other participant, with the initial motivation of refreshing and developing my coaching competence. For me, the relevance of attending this course was primarily connected to my tuning in on the field of coaching from a practical perspective. All the same, my participation was, to a certain degree, also linked to the present research project, and the research design emerged during the course as a consequence of a growing curiosity about the experience of the leaders. The other participants were informed about the research project through informal conversations. For this reason, I might have been perceived as different from the others, even though we all took part in all the activities together and formed a group that, in my experience had a trusting and open culture where personal experience was shared throughout the process.

I chose to ask my co-participants who matched the selection criteria of the study (described in section 4.2.1.2 above) to contribute as informants in this research project, and I also contacted potential informants from other classes who had taken this specific course. The fact that I held a somewhat more “neutral” role in *my* course class, in terms of being a participant, basically on the same conditions as the other participants, than when I appeared as a researcher and co-facilitator in a *later* course class might contribute to influencing the encounter with informants from the different classes of the course in different ways.

One aspect of my participation is how my pre-understanding was formed in the course setting when it came to the informants I got to know in my course class, as also mentioned in section 4.2.1.3 above. During the course, ideas emerged as to these leaders’ understanding of coaching through their performance in the role of the coach and through the way in which their experience, ideas and reflections were shared and expressed in various course contexts. In this setting, I was coached by and coached all the leaders in the group of informants recruited from my course class. Furthermore, we participated in discussion groups, plenary discussions and informal social settings together. Ideas were formed through this process as to these leaders’ understanding of coaching. An image of the “ideal informant” emerged: an informant who displayed an “adequate” understanding of coaching, that is, an understanding similar to mine, and was willing to apply coaching in her leadership practice, but who experienced friction in the process of doing so. Such informants would have been ideal for confirming my prejudices and initial more or less conscious hypothesis.

Discovery and awareness of such discrepancies between my implicit and explicit epistemology, that is, between what I explicitly aimed to do and what I was implicitly thinking and acting on has been a crucial part of this research process. However, I feel safe in saying that this initial conception of the ideal informant has not been allowed to guide the selection process. As mentioned in section 4.2.1.3 above, all my co-students who matched the selection criteria were contacted. Along the way, I was surprised to discover that those informants I initially felt had not understood what coaching was about provided interesting, vivid and colourful descriptions of their experience of coaching leadership.

The fact that some kind of personal relationship had been established with some of the informants before the interviews as a result of my co-participation in the course, to a larger degree and in a different way than with others, might have

influenced this research. For instance, it could be that these informants felt that the relationship was a more symmetrical one because we had been co-students in the course together: just like I had seen them both succeeding and failing in the role of the coach, they had seen me do the same. This might have entailed a more open and honest sharing of experiences than in the interviews with the informants with whom I had not co-participated with. It could be that the informants with whom I had not participated in the course felt, to a larger degree than my co-students, that I *represented* the course organisers and that they felt more restrained in sharing, for instance, critical reflections on the coaching course or coaching and coaching leadership per se.

However, this could also be viewed in quite the opposite way. Precisely *because* the informants who were my co-students knew me somewhat better than the others, they might not dare to be as critical or share negative experiences about the course, or about coaching and coaching leadership with me for fear that I might be disappointed and that this might impair the relationship between us. In a sense, more was at stake since there was already a more personal relationship, whereas it could be that the leaders who did not participate in the course with me felt that they had no risk to run because they did not know me and therefore it did not matter what they said.

These are some of the reflections on possible ways in which my lack of “openness” and my participation in the coaching course with some of the informants might have influenced the interviews, the data and thus the research. In the section below, the data collection methods of the project will be described and discussed.

4.2.3. Data collection: Qualitative research interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) introduce their book “The Qualitative Research Interview” by stating: “*If you want to know how people perceive the world and their lives, why not ask them?*” (p.19, my translation). It is suggested that the idea of the qualitative research interview might, at first glance, sound simple: You bring your tape recorder with you, you push the record switch and you ask the informant to talk about the theme of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). However, the authors state that qualitative interviewing is a craft that requires training and refinement. It is argued that this does not seem to be sufficiently recognised in educational contexts, since arenas of practising the craft seem to be rare.

The craft of research interviewing is not merely about, for instance, asking the right questions at the right time. The ability to build trust with the informant and create conditions that make her feel comfortable and safe is emphasised, because this trusting relationship becomes the grounds from which the informant can speak as freely and openly as possible about the theme in question (Hermanns, 2004; Rowley, 2012). In this way, the research interview shares similarities with the counselling interview, for instance, it has been suggested that the counselling theory of Carl Rogers has been a source of inspiration in the development of the research interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Hence, my counselling background might serve as the “research apprenticeship” called for by Kvale and Brinkmann (2010). However, there is also a crucial difference between the two: whereas the counselling interview is designed to open for growth and personal change in the client, the research interview aims to develop intellectual insight in a specific phenomenon by investigating the experience of the informant (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Stelter, 2010). In the following the two kinds of interviews represented in this study, semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews, will be presented.

4.2.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

In the semi-structured interview, a few open-ended questions are listed in an interview guide, but the order of themes explored and questions asked might vary from one interview to the next (DiCicco-Blom & Crabtree, 2006; Rowley, 2012). The interviewer follows, to a large degree, the lead of the informant, and hence, themes that the researcher had not initially considered might be explored, and follow-up questions can be asked along the way (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Rowley, 2012).

In this study, ten semi-structured interviews have been conducted. An interview guide (see Appendix E) with themes and questions was developed as the background for the theoretical framework of this project. In preparing for the data-collection phase, a pilot interview was conducted with a leader who did not qualify as an informant in the study as he had not participated in the coaching course. However, he had taken courses in guidance and counselling which made it possible to explore neighbouring themes. The interview therefore had limited value in terms of directly testing the interview guide, but it served as valuable research-interview training. Moreover, it served as an interesting and important tuning in to the life-world of a leader with personnel responsibility, and hence, the interview guide was further

developed with this in mind. In the pilot interview I experienced limitations on the use of the interview guide in the interview situation as following the guide chronologically impaired the flow of the conversation. The guide was set aside at an early stage of the interview to open the way for a more free-flowing exploration of the themes.

In the ten semi-structured interviews, the interview guide thus served primarily as a list of themes to be explored (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). However, the interview guide, as it appears in Appendix E, is formulated as specific questions. Some of these were memorised and asked as they appear in the interview guide, whereas others were formulated more freely. The last part of the interview guide, about power and mutuality, was, in practice, omitted from the guide because I decided along the way not to ask direct questions about power and mutuality, but rather, leave it to the informants themselves to raise this theme if they found it relevant to their experience of coaching leadership.

The individual interviews lasted between one and two hours, and a brief pause was taken in the middle of each interview. During this break, the interview guide was checked to pinpoint any themes that had not yet been addressed. I also experienced that because of these breaks the conversations were rejuvenated. Reflections on the phenomenological aspects of the interviews are presented in section 4.2.3.3 below. In the following, aspects of the focus-group interviews are outlined.

4.2.3.2. Focus-group interviews

The focus-group interview might complement the individual interview in several ways. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), it might “*evoke a lively interpersonal dynamic and show the social interplays leading to the interview statements*” (p. 297, my translation, authors’ emphasis). Another advantage is the opportunity to establish trust with the informants in a less confronting setting where they can regulate their level of participation to a larger extent than in an individual interview (Kress & Schoffner, 2007).

It has been suggested that the focus-group interview can be positioned between the most common data-collection methods in the qualitative field: the individual interview and participant observation (Morgan, 1997). In relation to individual interviews, an advantage of focus-group interviews is the possibility to observe interaction and group dynamics (Morgan, 1997, p. 10). In a focus-group

interview, the interpersonal dynamic allows similarities and differences in the group of participants to emerge, whereas the researcher would have had to look more systematically for such variations in comparing individual interviews. In individual interviewing, however, the researcher has a greater amount of control, and more detailed information is gained from each informant (Morgan, 1997).

The two most defining features of focus-group interviewing is the emphasis on the *focus* of the conversation, maintained by the researcher, and the interaction arising in the group (Morgan, 1997). This is a balancing act, however. If the interviewer is not clear enough about the focus, the group might be carried away by the group dynamic and might be taken in a direction that does not serve the purpose of the study. On the other hand, if she is too insistent, the group's internal interaction could be disturbed, and possibly interesting information might be lost along the way. An interview guide was developed for the two focus-group sessions in this project, but it was much shorter than the one used for the individual interviews (see Appendix F). Just like in the individual interviews, this functioned as a checklist rather than being followed chronologically. The aim was to create a conversation that was as free flowing as possible.

Different opinions exist as to the ideal number of participants in the focus group. For instance, Morgan (1997) suggests that the group should consist of between six and eight participants, whereas Smith et al. (2009) hold that between four and five informants would be the ideal number. There are no right or wrong answers to this question, however, a group with too many participants might impede the development of the trust and comfort necessary for people to risk sharing personal experiences and engaging in lively discussions on the theme in question. On the other hand, with too few participants, difficulties might arise in creating the group dynamic needed for different perspectives to emerge.

In the two focus-group sessions arranged in this project, the number of informants was six and ten in sessions one and two, respectively. In relation to the issue of trust and comfort, it can be argued that since the sessions were arranged in the context of the coaching course, a certain level of trust might already have been established in the groups. The pedagogical structure of the course invites and opens for personal engagement and commitment, sharing and reflection in various settings. As such, the participants in the group were probably already socialised into a course culture where it is likely to believe that the personal sharing necessitates a certain

level of trust. In both focus-group sessions, personal experience, different ideas and perspectives were shared, and all the informants were more or less active. After having introduced some principles of the focus-group interview and presented ethical issues, the sessions started with an introductory round where each informant was supposed to reflect and share initial thoughts. This functioned as a “warm-up” phase for the focus-group interview sessions. Since each participant had initially let his or her voice be heard in the room, one might imagine that the threshold to share ideas and experience at a later stage of the discussion might have been lowered.

The two focus-group interviews were conducted within the context of the coaching course. Getting people together who matched the selection criteria outside the course context would have been economically, administratively and practically demanding. Since the research design was not ready when I participated in the course, conducting a focus-group interview in one of the modules of my class was not considered. Hence, the first session was arranged within a later course class. This session was carried out on day two of the second module of the course, after the day’s studies programme. Six people participated in this session. The second focus-group session was conducted in an advanced coaching course arranged by the same company, with participants who had all been through the basic coaching course at an earlier stage, as mentioned in the footnote above. A formal request was e-mailed to all participants in this course in advance (see Appendix C). Again, I participated as a co-facilitator in the course programme during the day, and the focus-group session was held after this. Ten people participated in this session.

In the following, the phenomenological dimensions of the research interviews will be discussed.

4.2.3.3. Phenomenological aspects of the interviews

A key concept in phenomenological research is the phenomenological reduction used to transcend the human tendency of predetermining the meaning of things, which is the mode of the natural attitude (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al., (2009): “*Our predilection for order can mean that we can too quickly look to fit ‘things’ within our pre-existing categorization system*” (p.12, authors’ brackets). What is expressed, for instance, by an informant in a research interview might therefore already be interpreted statements emerging from the natural attitude. Shifting from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude means to

“refrain from making judgements” (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004, p. 147), which implies that the researcher must continuously be attentive to her own tendency to categorise, interpret and judge (van Manen, 1997).

Moreover, the researcher must help the informant to transcend the natural attitude so the lived experience can be explored from the perspective of the phenomenological attitude. This implies that a trusting, non-judgemental open environment should be created in which all statements are welcomed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). However, this does not imply that the researcher cannot contribute to keeping the informant “on track” by, in a respectful way, trying to stay clear of themes irrelevant to the research, but this rather implies that when it comes to the description of the lived experience itself, there is no right or wrong answer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; van Manen, 1997).

In a research interview, several aspects might impede phenomenological reduction. For instance, an informant’s idea of what the researcher expects her to say, or her idealistic perception of the phenomenon, can obstruct an exploration of her lived experience. Moreover, one challenge might be that the informant speaks in general terms about her experience. If this happens, looking for concrete examples or illustrative anecdotes might be a way of coming closer to the lived experience of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). The researcher’s taken-for-granted understanding of the phenomenon, emerging from the natural attitude, might also impede the exploration of the lived experience (Dowling, 2004, 2007; Finlay, 2008). For instance, one might fall into the “trap” of believing that the informant’s understanding of a word, or a concept, is similar to one’s own. Simple questions such as *“what do you mean when you use such and such a word?”* might prevent premature interpretation (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). This became a helpful reminder for me in the interviews. Having read a lot about coaching, words such as “listening” and “empathy” had clear connotations for me, and I realised that I had sometimes taken their meaning for granted. Learning to include simple follow-up questions, such as *“what do you mean by listening?”* therefore became an important part of the research interviews.

As shown in the theory section above, the empathic attitude proposed by Rogers (1961/2004) involves opening up to the life-world of the other person whilst at the same time being aware of one’s own values and beliefs. Similarly, Churchill, Lowery, McNally, and Rao (1998) suggest that the phenomenological researcher

strives for an empathic attitude which involves both aspects: *“In empathy, while maintaining one’s own position as a researcher, one gradually allows oneself to feel one’s way into the other’s experience”* (p. 66). Phenomenological reduction does not imply an attempt to be objectivistic and detached, on the contrary, the researcher empathetically engages in the life-world of the other person and strives to be *“fully involved, interested and open to what may appear”* (Finlay, 2008, p. 3). The more the researcher is able to open up to the experience of the informant, the wider and richer the possibility becomes for later reflections on meanings (Finlay, 2008; Weertz, 2005).

As shown earlier in this chapter, phenomenological reduction involves “bracketing” or “bridling” one’s prejudice and pre-understanding in relation to the phenomenon in question. At an early stage of this project I became aware of a prejudice that threatened to impair or “intoxicate” (van Manen, 2007) the research. While watching the video recording of the first focus-group interview, I found myself being more attentive to the descriptions of certain informants than others. I realised that I questioned some of the informants’ understanding of the coaching concept, and listened more attentively to informants who seemed to have understood coaching the way I understood the concept. Dahlberg et al. (2001) suggest that research is carried out *“on behalf of the phenomenon”* (p. 97). It seems that doing research on behalf of the phenomenon meant, for me, being true to *my understanding* of the phenomenon, which served as a measuring tool for validating and disqualifying the experience of the informants, which is not at all the purpose of this project, as also mentioned above. In other words, there was a gap between the explicit purpose of the study and my implicit ideas of what I was doing: there was a lack of coherence in the epistemological dimensions of the research. Becoming aware of this prejudice was therefore a pivotal part of the research process.

Using the “free imaginative variation” method, as introduced by Husserl, various aspects of the phenomenon have been explored to *“distinguish essential features from those factual ones that are particular, accidental or incidental”* (Finlay, 2008, p. 7). As shown in the example of the phenomenon of fishing mentioned in section 4.1.1 above: what makes the experience of fishing different from going for a walk by the sea? Which essential characteristics must be present for the experience of fishing to be the experience of fishing and not something else? Does one go fishing if one does not catch any fish? What if I did not bring a fishing rod

because I was just going for a walk by a lake, but as I sat down, I saw fish jumping in the water and miraculously managed to catch one?

The free imaginative variation method has been used in the interviews in this research by taking a dialectic approach: asking about the situations where the leaders see themselves the most as coaching leaders and which situations where they see themselves the less as coaching leaders. For which of their employees do they use coaching the most and the less? Furthermore, questions have been asked as to what the leaders regard, from their experience, as the opposite of coaching leadership. In this sense, free imaginative variation is understood as exploring the variety, as well as the boundary, of the informants' experience of coaching leadership to distinguish key elements of this experience from less important factors.

In the following, the principle of crystallisation is outlined.

4.2.3.4. Crystallisation

The idea of bringing about data from qualitatively different sources by *triangulation* has been motivated by the purpose of increasing the validity of a study (Tracy, 2010). This thinking stems from a realist paradigm based on the ontological idea of a singular truth and the epistemological pursuit of such a truth (Tracy, 2010). Ellingson (2008) uses the word *crystallisation*, a concept which is designed to adapt to a post-structural paradigm, where the research purpose is to show reality in its diversity and multitude rather than reflecting on a singular truth as accurately as possible (Richardsson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005; Tracy, 2010). With its multisided form, the crystal can be observed in virtually infinite ways, depending on the angle of the observer and the way in which the light is reflected by the crystal surface. In contrast, the shape of a triangle is constant and indifferent to the viewpoint of the observer.

In this project, the purpose of collecting data from two different sources, individual interviews and focus-group interviews, is neither to increase the validity nor to strengthen the evidence of the findings. Rather, the two sources might entail information and knowledge that are qualitatively different. Metaphorically speaking, they might shed light on the crystal in different ways and thus enrich the experience of the crystal for the observer (Tracy, 2010). In his study of how adolescent males talked about their relations with the opposite sex, Wight (1994) interviewed the same informants in both focus groups and individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). The informants who were interviewed in a focus group first tended to talk in a more

“macho like” manner, both in the focus group and in the individual interviews, whereas the informants who first participated in an individual interview tended to talk in a way which seemed more sensitive to the female point of view – a “softness” which then disappeared when they entered the group session. Different discourses related to the opposite sex emerged when the two methods were used, and this study thus contributed to illuminating different qualities of the two methods (Morgan, 1997).

It has been argued that in phenomenological research, focus-group interviews are not appropriate because informants tend to share and exchange opinions and talk in generalised terms rather than exploring lived experience (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). However, Smith (2004) argues that the data from a focus group might be suitable for phenomenological research and analysis if “*the researcher is convinced that participants are able to discuss their own personal experiences in sufficient detail and intimacy, despite the presence of the group*” (pp. 50-51). In the introduction to the focus-group sessions in this study, it was clarified that I would be asking for examples from the informants’ everyday life as leaders, and that follow-up questions might be asked, such as “*What does this mean to you?*” In the second focus-group session, one of the informants who was asked for an example did not immediately remember a relevant example, but asked for time to think and search for examples from his work context. At a later stage in the interview, he returned to the conversation with an example. This was then repeated by one of the other members of the group, who referred to the first informant, asking whether she could do like he did and come back with an example later on.

This example illustrates several aspects of the focus group. First, when the other members of the group carry on with the conversation, it might be easier to reflect and search for examples than in an individual interview, where the informant is constantly involved in the conversation with the researcher. Second, it illuminates how a focus group might “live a life of its own”, so to speak, as the members create common norms and procedures that are indifferent to the guidelines of the researcher.

Another advantage of the focus group might be that participants inspire and encourage each other by sharing examples from their leadership. When one leader shares an example, associations might emerge in another in relation to her own experience. This might contradict the reservations of Smith (2004), expressed in the quotation above. The presence of the group does not necessarily impede involvement

and the sharing of experience, it might, under certain circumstances, be exactly the other way around, the presence of the group might give rise to examples which might not have emerged in individual interviews. In this particular project, because of the coaching course, the informants were already familiar with participating in groups where experience regarding coaching leadership was shared and discussed. Moreover, the informants were familiar with each other since they had already spent several days together in the course setting. Furthermore, although the two groups were not identical with the groups that had spent the day together, since only a limited number of the course participants stayed for the focus-group session after the day's studies programme, one might imagine that the group dynamic which emerged in these focus-group sessions was somehow related to the group dynamic in the course that the group was a part of.

In the following, the process of transcribing – and presenting excerpts from – the interviews is described.

4.2.4. Transcribing the interviews

The interviews have been transcribed verbatim, for the most part by me, the researcher, but also to some degree by an external professional transcriber. This person signed a written consent form on professional secrecy and conditions for storage of the data before receiving the tapes in question. Considerations about the transcriptions and the purpose of the study were communicated to the transcriber in advance. All the externally transcribed interviews have been checked while listening to the tapes to ensure the quality and a certain standardisation of the transcriptions. For instance, some short passages which were omitted from the externally written transcriptions because of murmuring, fast/quiet talk or electronic noise on the recording, could, in some cases, be perceived by me. At times this was because I had been present in the interview situation and therefore remembered what had been said, and other times, it was due to my knowledge of the coaching field.

4.2.4.1. Interpretive elements of the transcription

A transcription is not believed to be a direct representation of the interview to which it refers as aspects of interpretation are always implied in transferring speech to text (Christensen, Nielsen, & Schmidt, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). First, in this study, the interviews were carried out in Norwegian, which means that the passages that are made available to the reader in this text have been translated from Norwegian into English. Paradoxically, in attempting to re-create the perceived meaning of the text, it seems more reasonable to look for equivalent expressions in the language into which one translates the text rather than making literal translations. Here there are obvious elements of interpretation, in that the translator uses her subjective understanding when she looks for adequate expressions.

The translations of the passages that have been chosen to illustrate the subcategories in this thesis have been done by me as the researcher, however they have been quality checked by a professional proof-reader, who has also proof-read the entire thesis. In this process the Norwegian-language version of the excerpts has been presented to the proof-reader in the text next to the translated versions, all the way until the final proofreading. Ensuring that the meaning of the excerpts has been maintained to the highest degree possible has been an important element in the quality assurance of the study, and it has therefore been emphasised that the language of the informants is as close to every-day English speech as possible. In other words, the intention has been, throughout the process, to maintain as much as possible of the meaning of the informants' statements (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

Furthermore, non-verbal expressions such as body posture, gestures, paralanguage (tone or volume of voice, pauses or intonation), visceral colour and facial expression (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006) are only included in the transcriptions to a limited degree as these elements are concerned with meaning expressed through other channels than the words chosen and used. It seems commonly recognised that non-verbal expressions comprise a larger and more important part of communication than the meaning expressed in words does alone (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). This is particularly acknowledged in gestalt (Allan & Whybrow, 2008) and phenomenological (Spinelli & Horner, 2008) approaches within the coaching field, where non-verbal expressions are actively

addressed as a source of information and awareness-raising as a part of the coaching process.

Therefore, it might seem paradoxical that non-verbal expressions are for the most part excluded from the transcriptions of the interviews. However, aiming to include as much as possible of such communicative elements would first have required videotaping of all interviews and thus a considerably larger amount of work in transcribing and analysing the interviews. Second, this would have implied a focus on the communication itself as an objective of the research, and different tools would have been required to analyse the data.

It is believed that, for the matter in question here, it is the meaning that the informants express through their words, rather than the communication situation from whence these words emerge that is the main focus. In relation to this research, one might, however, have considered using techniques associated with coaching, counselling and psychotherapy in order to help the informant, so to speak, experience and live the phenomenon in the here-and-now (Stelter, 2010). This might be an area of further exploration for the author.

4.2.4.2. The rationale behind choices made in the transcription process

There is no right or wrong answer as to how the transcription procedure should be carried out (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Rather, the solutions to dilemmas faced by the researcher in this process are related to the overall research strategy of the project (Kowal & O'Connell, 2004; Sales & Folkman, 2000). For instance, in studies which focus on discursive aspects of an interview, communicative elements, such as pauses, repetitions of words and the tempo of the speech might be of relevance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). In phenomenological research, however, such dimensions are not necessarily emphasised to the same extent. The meaning of the lived experience of a given phenomenon is the objective of phenomenological research (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; van Manen, 1997). The *words* through which the informants express their experience are therefore considered important and for this reason a general aim while working with the transcriptions in this project has been to include all the words used by the informants.

However, elements of the verbal communication are omitted in some cases. For instance, small communicative units such as “mm” and “yes” are often used by me as the interviewer during the interview. The use of such “minimal

encouragements” is considered a crucial listening skill (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006), and therefore reflects important qualities of the researcher in terms of gaining the trust of the informant and creating an environment in which the informant is encouraged to share her experience (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). Hence, these communicative units are considered to be important aspects of the interview situation itself. However, this kind of minimal encouragement is not believed to be relevant for understanding the meaning of an informant’s experience as such, and they are therefore in some cases left out of the transcriptions, for instance, in passages when they occur just about after each of the informant’s sentences.

This illustrates the point made above, that the interview situation itself contains communicative aspects that contribute to the meaning-creating interplay (Smith et al., 2009) between the interviewer and the interviewee, whereas the transcriptions can only display a limited part of what went on in the interview situation (Christensen et al., 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that even the limited part of the interview situation that can be read in in the transcript must be regarded as a new construction that aims to “recreate” the particular interview situation, bearing in mind, however, that the interview situation cannot be represented or recreated in its entirety (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

4.2.5. Processing and presenting excerpts from the interviews

Another element that has relevance here is the importance of considering how excerpts from the interviews should be presented in the research report. Christensen et al. (2011) maintain that these “should” be edited. This does not mean, however, that the content of the data is manipulated in order to make the data itself appear as more adequate. Rather, the processing and editing is done for two purposes: that of facilitating the reading experience for the reader, and that of presenting the informants in an ethically responsible way. The first dimension is maintained by, for instance, removing elements that seem redundant in expressing the meaning in what the informant expresses, such as small communicative units like “mm”, and “eh” (Christensen et al., 2011), as also explained in the previous section. Considering this purpose, some repetitions might be removed and some words might be added.

In the following, an example is given of how such editing might proceed. In this instance it is important to note that, as with all the examples presented in 4.2.5, the Norwegian version of the chosen excerpts has, for confidentiality reasons, been

linguistically standardised, that is, translated into Norwegian standardised language. The transcriptions were written in the Norwegian dialects of the informants, for practical reasons. However, in the Norwegian language, the dialect will easily be a way of situating a person geographically, and thus it might have been easier to identify certain informants if excerpts had been presented in their dialect.

This is a passage from one of the informants – whom I have called “Carrie”³² – that is examined in the mastery subcategory³³ in Chapter 5, where she tells me in one of the focus groups about a conversation with an employee. In the first version of the passage the text is taken directly from the Norwegian transcription, in the second, this part of the transcription is translated into English, and in the third version, the passage is presented in its final form as it is presented in Chapter 5.

1. og det syntes jeg var og det fungerte veldig bra samtalen fungerte bra, fikk bra tilbakemelding etterpå og at og at jeg hadde vært til nytte da, at vedkommende så nye muligheter og så andre måter å kunne ta tak i sine utfordringer på...og det var e....det var veldig...va en veldig god opplevelse
2. and *that* I think was and it worked very well the conversation worked well, got positive feedback afterwards and that and that I had been helpful, you know, that the person concerned saw new possibilities and saw different ways of being able to deal with her challenges....and this was eh...this was very....was a very positive experience.
3. And I think this worked out very well, the conversation worked out very well, I got positive feedback afterwards, about having been helpful, you know. That the person concerned saw new possibilities and saw different ways of being able to deal with her challenges. And this was a very positive experience.

As the reader can see, the third version of the passage has omitted several repetitions that are in the second version. For instance, the repetition of “*and that*” is omitted, and the part that says “*eh...this was very....was*” has been removed from the last sentence to avoid the repetition. As mentioned in section 4.2.4.2, in a study with a different methodology, such repetitions could have been included as an important part

³² All names of informants that appear here and in the entire thesis are pseudonyms, as touched upon both in section 4.2.1.4 above and in section 4.3.3 below. Hereafter, the names of the informants will not appear in brackets.

³³ The three main categories and nine subcategories will be thoroughly presented in chapter 5.

of the analysis, whereas in this project they are considered irrelevant with respect to the meaning of the content of what the informant is expressing. Furthermore, in order to make this an entire sentence, a capital letter is added to the word “and” in version 3. The first version shows that in the transcription, the text often appears as a flow of words: however the sentences are arranged, as in this case, when the excerpts are selected and displayed.

The second dimension of such editing concerns the ethical safeguarding of the informants (Christensen et al., 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). It is through these excerpts that the informant’s “voice” is communicated to the reader, and hence, the researcher has an ethical responsibility when it comes to how the informant is “displayed” in the text. This is a part of the process which might contain dilemmas and challenges (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) show an example from Steinar Kvale’s own experience as a researcher, at a time when his transcriptions were guided by the idea that loyalty and objectivity would be promoted in the best way possible if he succeeded in reporting every single word that the informants had said in the interviews. One of the informants, a language teacher, replied to the researcher, after having read through the quoted text from his interview, that he felt embarrassed by the way in which he appeared in the text. This was because the quoted text reflected, according to the teacher “*very poor Danish language*” (Kvale & Brinkmann, p. 196, my translation). This could be due to repetitions of words or inclusion of fill-ins such as “m” and “eh”, which are characteristic of oral communication, but not normally included in written texts.

The researcher chose, bearing this in mind, to edit the excerpts into a written form that maintained the meaning of what the informant had said, but appeared as more linguistically correct (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Such choices are also made in this research. A question arises, however: who and what decides what makes the account linguistically proper or correct, and not least, does not such editing jeopardize the meaning of the informants’ experience? To reassure the reader that this is not the case, an excerpt from one of the focus groups is given below. Here, Shaun explains his experience of having been doing coaching without knowing what it was. As in the above examples, three versions are shown of the same passage: the Norwegian non-edited excerpt, an English translation of this non-edited excerpt, and finally, the edited English translation:

1. “det jeg opplever da, det å, at kanskje har hatt drevet med coaching uten å ha visst hva det var!”
2. “What I experience, sort of, to, that, maybe has had doing coaching without knowing what it was!
3. Well, what I experience is that I might have been doing coaching without knowing what it was!

The second version of the excerpt is likely to be a more demanding reading experience than the third because the sentence is not syntactically correct. Moreover, from an ethical perspective, which is in focus here, such a passage risks presenting Shaun as a person who is not able to express himself very clearly, and it might simply make him look less eloquent than he actually appeared to be in the interview situation, at least as I remember him. This illustrates the paradox mentioned above; in trying to be as close to the interview situation as possible by displaying what is said as precisely and directly as possible, one risks doing the opposite: presenting what is said in a way that to a smaller degree displays what was said as it was experienced by those involved (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

Again, it must be emphasised that being attentive to this ethical principle does not mean that the researcher decorates and polishes the data to make the informants' statements appear more appropriate or adequate than they were perceived to be in the recordings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). The guiding principles while choosing the excerpts and presenting them in the text is to transfer what was said in the interview as accurately as possible, while at the same time bearing ethical issues in mind, which paradoxically might involve editing the text so that it, at first glance, seems to deviate from the original situation, as mentioned above. The researcher must balance these two considerations in order to both be transparent for the reader in terms of showing how such choices are made, as I have tried to do in providing the examples above, and being ethically sensitive to the informants in the study. However, in order to maintain the confidentiality of the informants (see section 4.3 below), the transcriptions have not been included in their entirety as appendices to the thesis.

4.2.5.1. Parentheses in the interview excerpts

Some of the interview excerpts presented in Chapter 5 contain parentheses, meaning that part of the text from the transcription has been omitted. This has been done because the omitted part is considered irrelevant for illustrating the analytical point. Again, an example might help to illuminate this. In his interview, James explains how he “*hit the wall*” in the coaching course, because he realised he was not as good at communicating as he had thought he was. The following passage is an extract from James’ account in the mastery subcategory in Chapter 5. He says:

Because I’ve had this as a job for a while, you know, in slightly different roles. (...) So I’ve had to do with it quite a lot, and I think to myself that I’ve come quite well ok out of it.

This parenthesis symbolises a part of the text where James explains details about the different roles he is referring to. These details are considered irrelevant to the analysis and to the understanding of the meaning of what he is saying. In cases where excerpts are constructed with passages from different parts of the transcriptions with many pages between them, there will be no parenthesis, but a space of one line is left between the parts, as in Andrew’s account in the enrichment subcategory in Chapter 5.

Various aspects of the data-collection have been elaborated on here, and the process of transferring data from speech via transcriptions into edited excerpts has been examined and discussed. Below, I will reflect on the ethical dimensions of the project.

4.3. Ethical considerations

Developing ethical sensitivity and awareness is a crucial dimension of the research endeavour (Ryen, 2004; Silverman, 2006; Tracy, 2010). Ethical awareness and conduct reach beyond the so-called “procedural ethics” which are the formal guidelines and rules regulated by research approval committees (Tracy, 2010). Ethical issues pervade the entire research process, and the researcher needs to develop ethical awareness to make as well-reflected and anchored choices as possible (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this section, ethical issues related to qualitative research in general and this project in particular are discussed.

4.3.1. Ethics committee and the confidentiality of a third party

Applying for and gaining approval from a formal research ethics committee is, so to speak, the admission ticket to carrying out any research project (Tracy, 2010). This project has been approved by NSD (Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste), the Norwegian ethics committee for social research. The most salient ethical dilemma in this project, which was also discussed with the ethics committee, is the inclusion of a third party: the employees of the leaders in the study. The main focus of this project is to a large degree related to the leaders' relationships with their employees. However, these individuals have not been asked to participate in the study, neither have they given their consent to sharing information relating to them. Hypothetically, information relating to a third party who has not given consent to participate in the study might appear in all kinds of research interviews. People can share information about family, friends, colleagues, children, acquaintances and so forth. However, a crucial difference in this case is that in their capacity as leaders, my interlocutors are committed to formal and moral professional confidentiality in relation to certain issues that concern their employees, just like a medical doctor or a psychologist is bound by professional secrecy in relation to her clients. Should it then be considered unethical to study leaders' experiences in relation to their employees and would such research therefore be impossible?

This research is not targeting information shared by employees as such, but rather the leaders' experiences of the qualities of various relationships with their employees. Examples including the employees therefore function as a backdrop for understanding the leaders' experiences rather than being the main focus of the study. In each introductory conversation with the informants before the interviews, the issue of the third party has been an important theme. It has been emphasised that the leaders should not mention names because this is of no interest to the research, and it has been stressed that the leaders can change and anonymise the information in their examples. Furthermore, I have made it clear that what is interesting for the research is the essence of the examples rather than the details. In my experience, the leaders themselves seem particularly attentive to this issue. For instance, some leaders have asked me to pause the recorder while sharing experiences through examples where details might contribute to identifying individuals. When the recorder has been restarted, a summary of the example has been repeated for the shared story to be

applicable as data in the study. Several leaders have, themselves, insisted on the confidentiality of examples given in the interview before being willing to share them.

4.3.2. Informed consent

A crucial principle of research ethics is the concept of informed consent (Ryen, 2004; Silverman, 2006). According to Ryen (2004), this implies that informants have “*the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time*” (p. 219). The informants in this project have all signed written consent forms provided with the above-mentioned information document (Appendix B and C). In this document, the role of the informants was clarified and it was clearly pointed out that the informants could withdraw from the project at any point in time before publication of the findings, without having to give any reason for their wish to withdraw. The confidential nature of the research was emphasised by clarifying that all names would be anonymised and any other possible identifying elements would be changed. Information about storage and obliteration of the data material was also supplied.

4.3.3. Anonymising participants, manipulating details and member checking

To guarantee confidentiality, each informant quoted in the thesis has been given a pseudonym. Furthermore, information which is not directly relevant to the exploration of the phenomenon in question might be changed or omitted from the research report (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Sales & Folkman, 2000). In the information document on the base of which the leaders have given their consent to participate in the study (Appendix B and C), as well as in the introduction to the interviews, it has therefore been stressed that all information that might contribute to identifying people, both the leaders and their employees, will be changed or omitted. Details that can, at any level, contribute to identifying the leaders and their employees can be manipulated without decreasing the quality of the study as long as the meaning of the content is not changed. For instance, a man can be presented as a woman, a park can be described as the woods and a problem with depression can be generalised to a personal challenge without changing the meaning of the informant’s account. Such interventions might, in fact, contribute to *increasing* quality in terms of showing the ethical commitment of the informants involved (Sales & Folkman, 2000; Tracy, 2010). “Confusing” the reader to secure anonymity and confidentiality is not only legitimate, but also the

ethical duty of the researcher (Tracy, 2010). For ethical reasons, such text manipulation might be done at the cost of other qualities of the text, for instance, generalising depression to a personal challenge might make the text less vivid and personal, which is considered a quality feature of a research report. In this case, one quality criterion has been sacrificed to enhance the quality in an area that is considered even more important; the ethical commitment to the confidentiality of any individuals involved in the text (Tracy, 2010). In this study, making such modifications has been important so I could guarantee the anonymity of the leaders, and even more importantly, the anonymity of employees who have not given their consent to participate in the study.

Ethical principles are pertinent in all contact with informants (Tracy, 2010). It is of crucial importance that they feel safe and confident throughout the process. Ethical research conduct is thereby about showing respect for the informants and creating trusting relationships (Ryen, 2004). In the information document (Appendices B and C), the informants were reassured that they would be given the opportunity to read through the research material before publication. A book chapter in an anthology published during the Ph.D. process was therefore circulated to those informants whose information was used in the text so they could approve the use of the relevant passages. By the end of the project an e-mail was sent to all informants who are quoted in the text (see further explanation in section 4.3.6 below on considerations about the presentation of the informants), and the thesis was sent to those who wished to read through before publication. It was pointed out that at this stage the thesis was approved by my supervisors and by a professor from a different institution who had commented on the thesis in a final seminar. Furthermore, ethical considerations relating to anonymising and manipulating details that might identify leaders or employees were outlined. The point was to make the informants feel as safeguarded as possible. The offer to read through the text was therefore not given because I wanted to involve them in the analysis of excerpts from the interviews. Neither was it because I wanted them to approve the text in relation to the ethical considerations made. Both these aspects are solely the responsibility of the researcher (Tracy, 2010), and have been addressed through the long process of writing, reading, re-writing and re-reading in cooperation with supervisors, external readers and peers.

The process of “member checking” or “member reflections” has therefore not been used for this thesis, at least not in the understanding of the concepts suggested

by Tracy (2010). She argues that the phrase “member reflection” is more suitable in relation to qualitative research stemming from a constructivist paradigm than the phrase “member check” because the latter alludes to the search for a single truth, stemming from what has been referred to here as a “stable” ontology (Høyer, 2011); the researcher checks whether her interpretation is “true” by asking the informants whether she has understood them correctly. In this instance, however, the phrase “member check” seems more appropriate, although the use of it here does not have the implications suggested by Tracy (2010). I am not asking the informants to reflect and comment on or validate the analysis, which would be the function of member reflection and member checking, respectively. In this case, the member checking is carried out as a gesture to the informants to maintain ethical responsibility by ensuring that the informants in the study feel safeguarded, comfortable and confident about their participation (Tracy, 2010).

4.3.4. Maintaining confidentiality in the focus group

In the focus-group sessions, yet another dimension adds to the ethical complexity, because stories, thoughts and experiences are shared not only with me as a researcher, but also with the other members of the group. This issue was stressed in the introduction to each focus-group session, and everyone agreed that information shared in the group was to be considered confidential. As the focus group was arranged in the course setting, the informants in the group already knew each other, and the nature of the course might have contributed to strengthening the awareness of ethical issues. Creating a coaching relationship is to a large degree about establishing trust in the relation between the coach and the coachee (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Bluckert, 2005). This is an ethical issue where the coachee feels reassured that the information she shares is being treated confidentially by the coach (Anderson & Handelsman, 2010).

Another ethical dilemma in this study relates to the fact that some leaders have participated in both focus-group interviews and individual interviews. Hence, if they had been presented with the same pseudonym throughout the text, the other members of the focus group they participated in might have identified them in the excerpts from the *individual interviews*. To maintain confidentiality when it comes to what the informants have shared in the individual interviews, I have chosen to give the informants one pseudonym for each research interview they appear in, as mentioned

above. In the table where the informants are presented (Appendix D), some details connected to the informants that are represented several times are slightly manipulated for the same reason: to maintain the principle of confidentiality.

4.3.5. Ethical considerations regarding description of the coaching course

The coaching course is a part of the research context in this study. However, as mentioned in both the introduction and in section 4.2.1.1 earlier in this chapter, a detailed description of this course is not considered to be relevant in this thesis as it is not the experience of the course per se which is in focus here. However, it is primarily for confidentiality reasons that I keep the amount of information shared about the theoretical foundation and the didactic principles of the course to a minimum. If it had not been for the ethical responsibility of confidentiality of the leaders and their employees (see section 4.3.1 above) all the formal documents connected to the course could have been appended to this thesis. It could be argued that this principle has been applied too strictly, because if anyone should be able to identify the course, with the significant number of classes and the large number of participants who have been through the course so far it should be quite difficult for an outsider to identify informants according to their participation in the course. However, this issue makes it even more imperative to anonymise (Sales & Folkman, 2000) the examples given by the informants, first and foremost to prevent identification of employees through identification of their leaders.

An additional element in this instance is the risk that the leaders in this study might be identified by the other leaders in the course in which they have participated. In order to show reflexivity about how my co-participation with some of the informants in this study might influence the research, it has been necessary to be clear about the fact that I have participated in the course together with some of the informants. However, not revealing the exact number of informants with whom I co-participated with in the course is found to be a way of reducing the risk of identification. Since a large number of participants have attended the course, it could be argued that one can only guess at whom the informants might be. Nonetheless, it is believed that as little information as possible about the informants in question should be revealed, particularly due to the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of a third party: the employees.

In the following, ethical and epistemological issues relating to the presentation of the informants in this study will be presented.

4.3.6. Considerations of presenting and representing the informants

As mentioned in section 4.2.1.5, and for the reasons outlined above, the table in Appendix D includes 26 names with information related to them, although only 20 *persons* have participated in this study. However, neither all these 26 fictional names, nor the 20 actual persons will be found in the analysis chapter below in the form of excerpts from the interviews where they express something about coaching leadership. Some of the participants in the focus-group interviews have been omitted from the chapter on analysis. This relates to the epistemological considerations of this project. Since phenomenological research aims at grasping the lived experience of a given phenomenon (Finlay, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1997), the purpose is to create a picture of the phenomenon of coaching leadership as experienced by the leaders in this study. However, it is the *experience* as such which is in focus, rather than the experiencing subject: the *informant* (Dahlberg et al., 2001). The informants are, in a sense, media through which one might understand the experience of coaching leadership. Conducting research “*on behalf of*” (Dahlberg et al., 2001) the phenomenon of coaching leadership might therefore be understood as being as attentive and open as possible to the lived experience of the informants in relation to the phenomenon, and thus being enabled to create a picture of what this experience is like, based on all the accounts from all the informants.

Omitting some of the accounts from the study, or giving some informants more “space” than others has therefore been done on behalf of the phenomenon and not on behalf of the informants most represented. If the excerpt from one informant seems to illustrate the content of a category in a more precise, vivid or clear way than the one from another informant, the former is chosen to represent the experience of the phenomenon over the latter, even if the first informant has already been more represented by excerpts involving her than the other. However, a question arises as to how such decisions are made: Who and what decide what is a “precise”, “vivid” or “clear” statement? And according to which principles are such choices made? First, it must be clarified that the purpose of showing the excerpts from the interviews presented in the analysis chapter is to illustrate a category that represents a tendency in the data. In other words, the excerpts contribute to showing, clarifying and

explaining important dimensions of coaching leadership as they appear in the data of this particular study.

As will be further elaborated on in section 4.4.2.8 below, a guiding principle in writing the research report is to make the phenomenon, so to speak, come to life for the reader (van Manen, 1997) through vivid (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005; Tracy, 2010) and “thick” (Geertz, 1973) descriptions. The purpose is to help the reader imagine, through the written report, what the experience of the phenomenon, in this case coaching leadership, might be like (van Manen, 1997; Tracy, 2010). For this reason, it seems more reasonable to include a passage from the interview where, for instance, the informant manages to say much in just a few words, or expresses herself through metaphors or images that seem to illustrate the experience in a precise way, than a passage where the informant uses many words to in fact say very little or expresses herself in a trivial or unclear way. However, it is important to note that when one statement is chosen to represent a subcategory, there is indeed more “documentation” in the data of the same principle. Other statements from other informants might as well have illustrated the point, but perhaps in a way that would not have made the principle as clear to the reader.

Another point that seems important to make here is that the reason why some informants are more represented than others through excerpts is *not* because I found some interviews or informants more interesting than others per se. As elaborated on in the reflexivity section above, prejudices regarding informants and their understanding of coaching leadership have been addressed along the way and eventually I believe that I have managed to develop curiosity and wonder as to the lived experience of each of the informants with respect to their experience of coaching leadership.

Ethical reflections regarding the research process have been presented here. The analysis process of this study will be described and discussed below.

4.4. Analysis

Doing qualitative analysis is an iterative circular process in which it is difficult to determine a beginning or an end (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). From the perspective of hermeneutical philosophy, we are, as human beings, inherently interpretive as interpretation is an instinctive part of our being-in-the-world (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 2008; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Varela & Shear, 1999). Analysis and interpretation are therefore intertwined elements of the process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Thagaard, 2013). From this perspective, one might ask: at what point in the process does the analysis start? However, this section primarily focuses on the formal part of the analytical procedure: the process of transforming hundreds of pages of transcripts into analytical findings, the findings of the study. In a phenomenological-hermeneutical sense, this means finding a way of exposing the meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1997). Furthermore, it implies becoming aware of pre-conceptions which prevent openness to this experience in order to bridle or bracket such pre-suppositions so that one can actively, empathetically and openly engage and dwell with the lived experience of the informants (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Finlay, 2008). In other words, it involves “tuning in” to the phenomenon so that it can reveal itself (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Hansen, 2012;). In this process, the initial pre-understanding is challenged, the horizon of meaning of the researcher is extended (Finlay, 2008; Weertz, 2005) and a new understanding of the phenomenon can be presented and discussed.

Because of the particularity and uniqueness of every research project (Patton, 2002), there is an inherent paradox in following analytical procedures (Smith et al., 2009). Manuals and guides can lead and inspire the researcher in the process, but the procedure of analysis emerges in the interplay between the personal qualities of the researcher and the unique data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this reason, the analytical procedure that has emerged in this research project will form the guiding logic of this section, and theoretical concepts which might illuminate and explain what has actually been done will be presented and outlined along the way. However, a brief introduction to the overall ideas that have guided the process are given in the following.

The analytical procedure in this project has been inspired by various theories on analysis, primarily from the phenomenological-hermeneutical field. Specifically,

the hermeneutical-phenomenological procedure proposed by Lindseth and Nordberg (2004), taking its point of departure in the ideas of Paul Ricoeur, has been an inspiration. Moreover, the principles of IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis), as expressed by Smith et al. (2009), have informed the process.

Ricoeur (1973) highlights the principle of distancing and objectifying the text from the author (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009). The text lives a life of its own. Meaning is thus not to be found merely within the reader, but neither does the text hold any inherent meaning independent of the reader (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009). The reader influences the text and the text influences the reader (Smith et al., 2009). A text does not have only one meaning but neither do we find an infinity of possible meanings (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). According to Lindseth & Nordberg, *“We avoid thinking both that we have the whole truth and that there is no truth to find. The truth is not hidden behind the text; it is disclosed in front of the text, when the interpreter meets the text”* (p. 151).

Ricoeur (1976) suggests that hermeneutics is an “argumentative discipline”. An interpretation might be more or less suitable and appropriate and the credibility and trustworthiness of the interpretation may be conveyed through the argument (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009). Moreover, the adequacy of an interpretation is determined by its internal consistency (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). For instance, an interpretation of a statement does not seem reasonable if it contradicts a statement from the same person in a different part of the interview text (Westlund, 2009). Whatever the case, this discrepancy must be considered and addressed to refine and develop the interpretation (Westlund, 2009). Searching for meaning in a text is thus not about searching for a single truth, hidden in the text. On the contrary, it is assumed that a complete understanding is impossible and, hence, one looks for possible meanings that are then probed and re-probed, written and re-written, defined and refined, in a continuous argumentative process (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

4.4.1. The role of the research question

A crucial principle in any qualitative research is that the analysis should be guided by the research question (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). The research question communicates the governing idea of the research project and contributes to keeping both the researcher and the reader “on track” by serving as a continuous reminder of what the project is about (Fejes & Thornberg, 2009; Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2010). Moreover, the quality of the research is, to a large degree, determined by the coherence between the research question and the text, as well as between the research question, the data and the findings (Fejes & Thornberg, 2009; Larsson, 2005; Tracy, 2010). As such, the findings must relate to the research question.

In this study, the research question is: “*How is coaching leadership experienced by leaders, and how does coaching influence leadership?*” It has two intertwined parts in the sense that the second part also illuminates the experience of coaching leadership. The second part: “*How does coaching influence leadership?*” refers to the process that is shared by all the informants in this study: They have attended the same coaching course, and they have attempted to integrate and activate coaching within their respective leadership contexts. In the interviews, several questions have been asked as to which elements the leaders consider the most important of what they learned in the course, and which parts have been the most useful and relevant in relation to their leadership. Such questions are not asked with the intention of *evaluating* the coaching course, but rather they contribute to encompassing the experience of coaching leadership. For instance, if an informant talks about techniques and methods learned in the course that have proved irrelevant to her leadership, this information contributes to understanding how coaching leadership might and might not be experienced by the leader. The intention of probing into the influence of coaching on leadership is thus not to measure *effects* of coaching on leadership, but rather to shed light on the essential meaning of the experience itself, which is communicated in the first part of the research question: “*How is coaching leadership experienced by leaders?*”

Some overarching perspectives on and guiding principles of the analytical process, and the role of the research question have been discussed here. In the following, a detailed description of the process as it has unfolded in this project will be presented.

4.4.2. The analytical procedure in this project

4.4.2.1. Reading and re-reading: The naïve analysis

In the first phase of the analysis the interviews were repeatedly read and re-read in different ways. This “reading and re-reading”³⁴ (Smith et al., 2009) has served several purposes and led to various outcomes. First, this has been a way of familiarising myself with the data to the extent that in my capacity as a researcher, I know the interviews in and out (Smith et al., 2009). Knowing the data almost “by heart” has been the foundation for developing themes and categories at a later stage. Second, this “reading and re-reading” approach has been a way of acquiring a “sense of the whole”, as expressed by Giorgi (1985). Following hermeneutical principles, active, deliberate shifts between the whole and the parts have been an important part of the process. Lindseth and Nordberg (2004) propose a phase of “naïve reading” as an initial part of the process whereby the text is read several times to grasp its meaning as a whole. The researcher tries to remain as open as possible so the text can “speak to” her, and she can allow herself to be moved by the text (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

This openness involves a continuous awareness of the background on which one understands the text as there is an on-going search for pre-conceptions which might blur the researcher’s ability to discover possible meanings (Dahlberg et al., 2001). It has been suggested that an initial summary should be written as a statement that could function as a guide in the subsequent process, and to which the results of the following structural analysis can be compared (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

In practice, the reading and re-reading approach has been undertaken in part while transcribing the interviews. As mentioned in the section on transcription above, the majority of the transcriptions have been written by me, the researcher, whereas a limited part of the data has been transcribed by an external, professional transcriber. However, all of the interviews have been reviewed several times, including those externally transcribed. Due to my novice skills in this area, transcribing the interviews has been a skewed process. In some cases, I have taken initial notes while listening through the interviews the first time, and then developed the transcriptions from these notes while listening to the interviews again at other stages of the process. In terms of

³⁴ This sentence is not regarded as a quote and is therefore not put in italics nor referred to by page number as this is one of the analytical phases proposed by Smith et al. (2009), which is mentioned several times throughout the book.

the efficacy of the transcription process, this has not been that adequate. However, my transcribing skills and my confidence in the choices I have made along the way have been developed as a part of this process.

Moreover, the repetitive process of listening to the interviews over and over again while refining the transcribed text has been a way of becoming familiar with the text and formulating initial statements as to how the meaning of the phenomenon coaching leadership is expressed. As such, this might be understood as a naïve reading, which has taken place more or less parallel to the time-consuming, repetitive process of transcribing the interviews. However, the focus on transcribing the interviews might disturb the focus of getting a “sense of the whole” (Giorgi, 1985), which is the purpose of the naïve reading (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). Nevertheless, in this process of reviewing the interviews repeatedly, analytical journals have been established for each of the interviews and overall general analytical journal has been kept for the process as a whole. Initial analytical ideas and overall impressions have been noted in these journals. The phenomenological text, proposed by Lindseth and Nordberg (2004) has not been formulated, but overall analytical ideas and reflections have served a function similar to the naïve reading.

4.4.2.2. “Initial noting” and the development of emergent themes

After the initial phase of “reading and re-reading” (Smith et al., 2009), I moved to a more structural analysis process (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). In this phase, I chose to work with QRS NVivo. This is a computer aided qualitative data analysis software that assists in the analytical process in qualitative research (Bazeley, 2007), and facilitates the process of structuring and sorting large amounts of qualitative data. However, even if computer aided software might increase the efficiency of the analytical work, the analytical structuring of the data is as much in the hands of the researcher as when such software is not used (Bazeley, 2007). If this dimension is not recognised, the researcher is likely to let the procedure proposed by the programme to take control over the analytical process and thus lapse into a mechanistic approach rather than an active creative agent in the analytical process (Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1997). When using computer aided programmes, the researcher can be tricked into believing that the software itself ensures the rigor and thoroughness of the research (Gibbs, 2002). Since QRS NVivo was initially created to support grounded-theory-based analytical procedures, researchers might, for instance, commit

themselves to the use of grounded-theory principles rather than to procedures that would have been more appropriate in relation to the project in question (Lonkila, 1995). However, due to the registration of every single action made in QRS NVivo according to date and time, the programme might facilitate the tracking of the process, and thus support the transparency of the analysis (Bazeley, 2007).

Each interview was imported into the computer programme and the process of “developing emergent themes” (Smith et al., 2009) commenced. In QRS NVivo, the noun “node” is used to describe the developed theme. Since this programme has emerged from a grounded-theory paradigm, as mentioned above (Lonkila, 1995), the process of “open coding” (Charmaz, 2003) might be the most appropriate concept for describing what the software allows in this phase. The “nodding” process might be understood as a way of condensing, or reducing, the data to fewer and fewer units, that is sub-themes, themes and main themes (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). According to Lindseth and Nordberg (2004), a theme is “*a thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few. It is seen as conveying an essential meaning of lived experience*” (p. 149). Passages of the text are selected and given names according to their perceived meaning as interpreted and understood by the researcher. The “nodes” are subsequently structured into a list where it is easy to track the passages sorted under each node. In this process, one might choose to sort the selected passages in already established nodes or create new nodes.

Unfortunately, I found the QRS NVivo programme unsatisfactory and limiting in several ways. This can be explained by the low compatibility with I-Mac operational systems and the fact that I have no training in how to use the software. In the “nodding” process, I was frustrated because I could not note anything down that came to mind about the statements of the informants alongside the transcribed text. The process of developing emergent themes felt premature, and I easily fell into the trap of interpreting the statements in flat, one-dimensional ways, without being able to look for alternative interpretations. According to Lindseth and Nordberg (2004), “*When we feel a text is dead, it can be because our pre-understanding is too superficial or inappropriate, we cannot grasp essential meanings in the text*” (p. 152). Similarly, Dahlberg (2006) cautions that the researcher must not understand “*too quick, too careless, or slovenly*” (p. 16).

In QRS NVivo’s nodding process, one is “forced” to use as few words as possible to describe the meaning of the selected passage (Bazeley, 2007). I therefore

chose to establish an excel document for each of the interviews where the transcribed texts were imported into the left columns. The neighbouring column was for my notes. In this phase, anything that came to mind about the informants' statements was noted. This became an inspiring and crucial part of the process in terms of opening up to the lived experience of the informants and trying to empathically dwell in their experience to grasp its meaning (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Valle et al., 1989).

This phase, which might correspond to the "initial noting" suggested by Smith et al. (2009), became an important way of raising awareness about prejudices regarding the informants and their statements, and thus overcoming their "seductive power" (Finlay, 2008). As mentioned above, Gadamer (1960/2013) suggests that prejudices that the researcher is not aware of will inevitably influence the research process. By writing down such prejudices along the way, they are externalised and objectified. Visually facing the prejudices has, for me, been a steppingstone to transcending to new levels of understanding. It has felt as though I have held my presuppositions in my hands, looked at them and then let them go. This phase of initial noting has thus been an important process relating to the phenomenological reduction (Dowling, 2004; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). It has helped me open up to the multivocality (Tracy, 2010), the polyphonic choir of voices in the data, and to discover the richness of the lived experience of the informants (van Manen, 1997).

In the beginning, I carefully reviewed the interviews in the excel files, from the first to the last. Eventually, these files functioned more as a corrective tool whenever I felt that I could not find the appropriate words to describe the meaning of a selected passage, or when I experienced difficulties in opening up to the life-world of the informants (Dahlberg et al., 2001). In such cases, I sometimes went through selected parts of the interview in question in the reverse order, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009), to enhance my capacity to discover new possible meanings of the text. The procedure of initial noting related to the excel documents has been a way of understanding the multifaceted lived experience of the informants.

When the process of "developing emergent themes" had been completed in terms of having gone through each of the 12 interviews with a close-up analysis of each passage, I started to sort the themes into larger analytical units by "searching for connections across emergent themes", which is one of the procedural steps suggested by Smith et al., (2009). In this phase, the entire data material was included in the process. I looked for connections between the nodes that had been created in the

preceding phase and these were then sorted into overarching themes. Again, I discovered limitations in the QRS NVivo programme, again which might be linked to incompatibility with the I-mac software. Instead of sorting the nodes into “tree nodes”, which is proposed by the programme, I therefore chose to organise the nodes into folders. This seemed to be a more intuitive and frictionless procedure, in a strictly technical sense. The first categories that emerged were given spontaneous, intuitive names. While the content of a category would not necessarily be theoretically embedded, the names could serve as intuitive ways of structuring the data (Bazeley, 2007). The folders created in this initial part of this phase were given names such as “expectations for the course”, “I use coaching to.....”, or “It is hard to coach when.....”. At this point in the analysis, however, a radically different strategy was chosen, which will be described in the section on the “top-down” approach below.

4.4.2.3. Comprehensive understanding: interpreted whole

Lindseth and Nordberg (2004) suggest that when the structural analysis comes to an end in the sense that meaning has been “condensed” into the smallest units possible, the main themes, one comes to the stage of interpretation of the whole. The proposed procedure is to go back to the naïve reading and compare the results of the structural analysis with the initial statement that attempted to grasp a sense of the whole. The two are then compared, and if there are discrepancies between them, the naïve reading is redone, the text is read yet another time, again with as open a mind as possible, and a new statement of the new naïve reading is formulated. A new understanding of the whole is then influenced by the understanding of the parts that has emerged from the structural analysis. Bearing in mind this new understanding that has emerged from the new naïve reading, the researcher goes back to the structural analysis, which is then redone. This intentional move between the parts (the structural analyses) and the whole (the naïve reading) is the dynamic of the hermeneutic circle (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

Even though it has been acknowledged that the structural analyses and the naïve reading influence each other, the part is understood in light of the whole, and the other way around, it is important that each phase is carried out with as open a mind as possible. This does not mean that pre-conceptions are not recognised, on the contrary, it is assumed that interpretation emerges from our pre-understanding, and as such, “*we cannot free ourselves from our pre-understanding. We are only aware of*

aspects of it” (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004, p. 150). However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is a fundamental difference between the pre-understanding that influences the research in a negative way and obstructs our ability to understand the phenomenon as it is lived and the pre-understanding that enables comprehension (Gadamer, 1960/2013). Whilst undertaking the naïve reading, one remains as open to the text as possible, and by reviewing the parts in the structural analysis, one attempts to be as true to the meaning conveyed in the parts as possible. The researcher is challenged to read the text over and over again, always with the intention of reading with as open a mind as possible (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

In the hermeneutical perspective, reading a text is understood as an on-going, constructive dialogue between the reader and the text. We understand and interpret in the dialectic between meaning that is project into the text by us, and the meaning revealed to us by the text (Smith et al., 2009). When we start reading, as soon as meaning emerges from the text, a meaning of the text as a whole is projected (Gadamer, 1960/2013; Smith et al., 2009). However, in using the repetitive process of the phenomenological reduction, the researcher attempts to let the text speak to her, conveying the meaning of lived experience (Finlay, 2008; van Manen, 1997). Only then can the possibility of being moved, surprised, engaged and transformed by the text be created (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Finlay, 2008).

Lindseth and Nordberg (2004) describe the naïve reading and the structural analyses as separate phases, or modes, between which the researcher moves intentionally until the understanding and interpretation emerging from the two modes cohere. In this project, the shift between these two modes has been practised more continuously. Parallel to the time-consuming and at times daunting procedures of the structural analysis, I have asked myself questions such as: *“In what ways does the text I just read (the part), relate to my overall impression of all the other text I have been reading so far (the whole)?”* For instance, overall analytical ideas and reflections, emerging as a consequence of the detailed, close-up, systematic organising of the data, have been written in the analytical journals as they have emerged, and been systematised according to the date. Various techniques and media have been used to “zoom out” and take a more holistic perspective on the data so I could refine the understanding of the whole. While working with the detailed analysis of a part of an interview, I have taken frequent pauses during which I have gone for short walks in the immediate environment or discussed things with colleagues. The mere act of

pausing from the close-up analysis of the parts has almost inevitably contributed to refreshing the view I have had when I have returned to them. During such breaks, a renewed understanding of the whole influences the meaning-creating interaction with the parts.

Another technique used to intentionally shift between different modes and perspectives in relation to the data has emerged in the dynamic between expressing and absorbing, talking and listening. In this instance, monologues have been recorded, where ideas have been probed and analytical reflections have been expressed. In some cases, intuitive statements have been made as to the essential meaning of the experience of the phenomenon coaching leadership, as interpreted by me at this particular point in time. This might be understood as a manifestation of the naïve reading proposed by Lindseth and Nordberg (2004). Typically, such monologues have been recorded in the car on the way home from work, and the next morning, again in the car, while listening to the monologue from the previous day, yet new meanings, ideas and understandings have emerged, which have then been noted in the analytical journal. The naïve reading has thus been continuously developed and refined as new understanding has emerged. All in all, this process has also been informed by feedback from supervisors, peers and colleagues, a dimension that will be explained below.

4.4.2.4. From bottom-up to top-down: A comprehensive understanding

At one point in the process, I chose to shift from the structural analyses, which could be described as a “bottom-up” process, to a more interpretative mode, which might be labelled as a “top-down” approach. Experiencing frustration, disillusion and a feeling of “groping in the dark” in the analytical process, I chose to temporarily leave the structural analyses that I have here labelled the “bottom-up” approach, to let a more “top-down” oriented approach guide the process. I then started to work with the overall structure of the data while keeping the “naïve reading” expressed in the analytical journals in mind. In a sense, one might say that I prematurely forced an overall structure onto the data as the starting point of an experimental process where possible names and labels of categories were tested in relation to the data. However, this structure did not miraculously come out of thin air, rather it grew out of the detailed knowledge of each interview acquired through countless hours spent with the text, painstakingly going through each interview in different ways.

Moreover, this structure emerged from a continuous interaction between the parts and the whole, where the naïve reading, as manifested in the analytical journals, was compared to the different parts and where categories, subcategories and the analytical text were gradually developed in relation to the naïve reading through an experimental process. The naïve reading was redone, the interviews were read through again with as open a mind as possible, and this understanding was, again, compared to the structure to confirm or disprove its elements, and in this way develop it further. The structure was thus probed and re-probed, the chapter on analysis was written and re-written using feedback from peers and supervisors, and the initial results were shared and discussed in different contexts. In this sense, a dynamic move between top-down-oriented and bottom-up-directed movement has characterised the process.

The development of the structure, including categories and subcategories, is the result of a process that has probably been as time-consuming and painstaking as if had I arrived at the categories and subcategories by continuing the “bottom-up” procedure of the structural analysis, if not more. The final structure, which is thoroughly presented in Chapter 5 below, consists of three main categories, each containing three subcategories. This structure is presented in Figure 2.

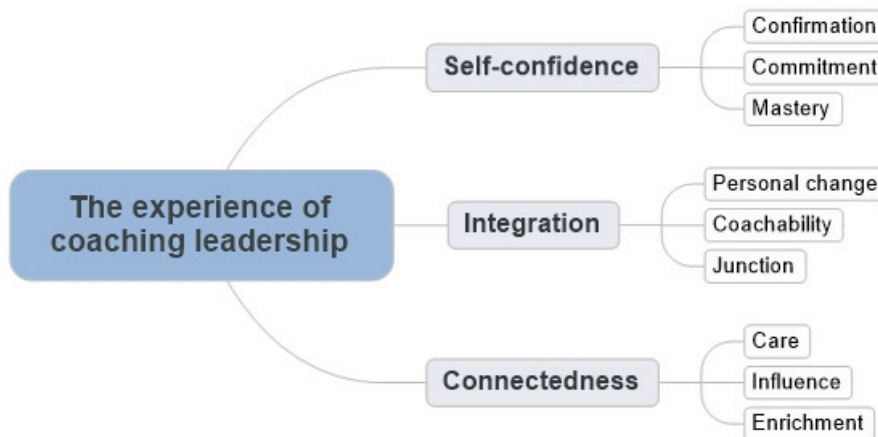


Figure 2: The structure of the analysis

A question arises, however, as to why and how the analysis resulted in exactly three categories with exactly three subcategories under each of them. This is further elaborated on and explained below.

4.4.2.5. Reflections on the substance and number of categories and subcategories

The structure presented in figure 2 is believed to adequately reflect the empirical data of this study in relation to the purpose of the research and the research question. This does not mean, however, that this is the only possible structure. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a different researcher would, even with the same focus and research question, probably have displayed the meaning of the phenomenon coaching leadership in another way. As argued above, a text, which in this case refers to the transcribed interviews might have multiple meanings (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). The analysis of the meaning of the experience of the researched phenomenon, in this case coaching leadership, emerges in a dynamic interplay between the researcher and the data (Smith et al., 2009). As such, the analysis does not depend merely on the focus and scope of the research, but also on the researcher's *horizon* (Dowling, 2004) of understanding and meaning. This does not mean, however, as also shown above, that *infinite meanings* could emerge from the analysis of a text or specific data material (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004).

Again, it is believed that a completely different structure could have been displayed as a result of this unique data. The number of main categories could, as such, have been 5, 6 or 8, for instance, and the number of subcategories could, similarly, have been 4, 7 or 10, for instance. In the experimental process of testing and probing different names and labels for the categories and subcategories in relation to the data, many structures with different numbers of both main categories and subcategories were tested. A guiding principle in this process was the question of whether there were empirical grounds in the data to support the categories and subcategories chosen (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

Another question might arise as to why exactly, for instance, *self-confidence* is presented as a main category in the data, and not something else. The answer to this is that the main category called self-confidence has, just like the other categories and subcategories, emerged as a result of a process where I have been dynamically and repeatedly alternating between the parts and the whole (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004;

Smith et al., 2009). This has been the result of a process where this was one of the three elements of the experience of coaching leadership that seemed most important after I had gone through all the interviews over and over again. It remained one of the three tendencies that seemed most thoroughly represented in the data. In phenomenological terminology, it appeared and rose, so to speak, from the background that can be understood as the data as a whole. However, the name of the category was, for a period, simply confidence. After experimenting with this term in relation to the parts of the data that were believed to represent this tendency, it became clear that the word “self” had to be added for this to appear as meaningful in relation to the empirical data.

To illustrate how a category or a subcategory has “ascended” from the data and “come to life”, an example is given below from the interview with James. A tenth subcategory named “vulnerability” was at one point in the process a part of the analytical structure, and this possible subcategory was tested and probed in relation to the data with the help of supervisors and peers. However, the experience of vulnerability in relation to coaching leadership did not “prove” to be adequately anchored in the data to carry an entire sub category “on its shoulders”. It was considered that there was not enough support in the data to justify an entire category with this name. This does not imply, however, that the parts of the data that were at this stage interpreted as “vulnerability” are now excluded from the analysis, but rather, these elements are now to be found under different analytical units, with a slightly altered focus of interpretation, as exemplified below.

This process might be said to have a quantitative element to it, in the sense that I did not find enough extracts/quotations that might have served to underpin the category and justify its “status” or position as a subcategory. This does not mean that an experience must be shared by *all* the informants for it to appear as an important part of the phenomenon: alternative voices and views should not be omitted from the analysis because of its deviation from the majority of voices (Tracy, 2010), rather, they should be included to show the multiple sides of the crystal that can serve as a metaphor of the phenomenon studied (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005; Tracy, 2010). As described above, I have worked extensively on including voices that point in different directions than that of the majority of the informants. However, such “single voices” cannot “carry” the main categories or the subcategories in the analysis because the categories and subcategories must, in some way, be representative of

main tendencies in the data (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). As such, the main categories in this analysis are believed to show and display the most important elements of the meaning of the experience of coaching leadership as they appear in this unique data.

As explained above, when one category is probed and tested in relation to the data and found to be inadequate for representing main tendencies in the data in relation to the research question, this has consequences for the rest of the structure. This might be understood in terms of a “domino effect” – just as when one piece in the domino game is removed, all the pieces fall and must be re-arranged – when one piece changes its place in the categorical system, the entire system as a whole needs to be re-organised.

In relation to the example of vulnerability above, one might say that the dimension of the empirical data that in an earlier structure appeared as vulnerability has eventually been placed under a different umbrella, namely the subcategory “mastery” in the categorical system presented in Chapter 5. This subcategory seemed to be representative of an important tendency in the data, and in this way, an alternative voice could also be included in the subcategory. In the following passage, the reader might judge for herself whether the statement might be understood as an expression of vulnerability:

James: This is one of the things which I thought was....terrible! (both chuckle) in the course. Where you, sort of, really hit the wall when it comes to what you're not good at. That really hits you, you know. I thought that those.....many of those....what was it that we called them again? These...triads! That's what we called them. That was just awful. For me it was totally terrible.

Gunhild: Really?

James: Really terrible.

Gunhild: All the way through?

James: Yes, more or less (both chuckling). Because I've had this as a job for a while, you know, in slightly different roles. (...) So I've been doing this quite a lot, and I think to myself that I've made my way through this quite okay. Have received, sort of, decent feedback from people I've worked with, kind of, and....that yes, they thought it was okay to come to me!

In the final analysis structure presented in Chapter 5, the content of this passage is understood as part of a dialectical process that involves both mastery, in terms of James' earlier experience of having “*made his way through this quite okay*”

and having “*received decent feedback*”, and opposing feelings, expressed through words such as “*terrible*” and “*awful*”. In other words, the vulnerability dimension has disappeared, but is transcended, which means that it is also included in the mastery subcategory. Furthermore, as shown in the analysis chapter below, James shows, through other extracts from the interview that he has eventually found a way of including coaching in his leadership that might be interpreted as an experience of mastery. What was in an earlier phase understood as vulnerability is now understood as mastery, in the sense that the experience of mastery involves, in James’ case, an experience of vulnerability. These interpretations will be further explored in the analysis chapter below. In this instance, the example serves as an illustration of how the experience of James has “found an adequate place” in the analysis structure in spite of a seemingly opposing experience than that which is expressed in the other interviews.

This shows the hermeneutical (Gadamer, 1960/2013) dimensions of the analysis process. When one piece is understood in a new light, it has consequences for how one regards the whole, and the other way around (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, it is illustrative of the iterative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) aspect of the research process: the knowledge that is constructed through the research must be understood in terms of a dynamic and circular movement, rather than a linear, cause-and-effect process that unfolds in a predictive and logical manner. It must be pointed out that the three main categories and the nine subcategories that constitute the final analysis are not to be seen as predefined theoretical entities. Rather they are anchored in the empirical data, and have emerged from a “meaning-creating interplay” (Smith et al., 2009) between the parts and the whole of the empirical data, as described and exemplified above.

An example of the analysis structure as it appeared at an earlier stage of the analysis process is given in Appendix G. The structure presented in Figure 2 above is what appears to be the most appropriate way of presenting the analysis of the lived experience of the phenomenon coaching leadership as it appears in this study, after testing and re-testing a large number of different structures. This does not imply that there could not have been other ways of presenting the phenomenon according to the data in this study, as mentioned above. The idea of the multiple meanings of a text is further explained in the following section on the meaning of metaphors.

4.4.2.6. The meaning of metaphors in the analytical process

There are multiple ways of analysing a given text (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004), and there is no unequivocal criterion that can be used to measure the quality of a qualitative analysis (Tracy, 2010). In this project, the emergence of metaphors has been a source of inspiration in the analytical process. A metaphor essentially means understanding something in terms of other things, or grasping something that is not easily understandable by converting this unknown element into something familiar (Moring, 2001). Metaphors are often used to describe the researcher and the entire research process, such as the metaphor of the explorer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010), the quilt maker (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) or the detective (Moring, 2001).

It has been suggested that “*metaphors deeply guide our thinking and are also a part of the way in which we interpret everyday experiences*” (Moring, 2001, p. 348). In this project metaphors have become important guides in the process. For instance, the metaphor of the mosaic maker, which resembles the metaphor of the quilt maker, has been a guide to understanding the analytical process. Just like the mosaic maker creates unique patterns from random pieces of, for instance, broken tiles, the researcher puts together different analytical ideas into a larger structure that eventually becomes the presentation of the findings. Just as the mosaic pattern is probed under the critical eye of the mosaic maker before it is glued to the board, the researcher probes her findings and results over and over again to find the pattern which makes the most sense and gives the most coherence, and where the strongest arguments support both the parts and the whole (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004)

Another metaphor, which has inspired the interpretative process in this project is the kaleidoscope, where colourful patterns emerge from numerous small pieces. Every time the kaleidoscope is shaken a different pattern emerges from the same pieces. This illustrates the multiple meanings that can be found in one single text (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Lindseth & Nordberg).

A third metaphor that has been a source of inspiration in this study relates to the gestalt idea of figure and ground (Hostrup, 1999; Ivey et al., 2012). A memory from my time in high school has emerged in my reflections on this issue. In the early 1990s a certain kind of picture displaying repetitive patterns was very popular. If you looked at the picture long enough, a figure would eventually arise, such as the

contours of a dinosaur or a cat. If a figure is to emerge, something must form the ground from which the figure arises. In this project, this idea has helped me to realise that in order for an analytical structure to arise, some parts of the data must inevitably be considered less important.

Moreover, this metaphor might illustrate the meditative element of phenomenological research. Dahlberg (2006) describes the analytical process as “‘actively waiting’ for the phenomenon, or its meaning(s), to show itself” (p. 16, author’s brackets and parenthesis). The analytical process requires patience and perseverance, the researcher must endure seemingly endless desert journeys before the pattern that seems to most adequately capture the essential meaning of the phenomenon, as experienced by the informants in the unique study, emerges. This does not imply, however, a passive process in which one does nothing but wait. Rather, as expressed in the above quotation, it is an active process of continuously working: trying and probing, drawing, talking, walking, listening, thinking, writing and so on. This analytical strategy is explained in more detail in the section below on abduction.

4.4.2.7. Abduction

Abduction is a concept introduced in the area of qualitative research by Charles Sanders Peirce in the beginning of the 20th century (Reichertz, 2004). It aims to enable social researchers to “make new discoveries in a logically and methodologically ordered way” (Reichertz, 2004, p. 160). However logically and methodologically ordered, it is suggested that abduction is not an “exact method” (Reichertz, p. 163). Rather, it is a creative and intuitive way of working to allow the unexpected to emerge. Reichertz (2004) compares the abductive mode to actively waiting for lightning to strike, a metaphor similar to Dahlberg’s (2006) notion of “‘actively waiting’ for the phenomenon” (p. 16, author’s brackets and parenthesis), mentioned above. Although one cannot force lightning to strike, one might, metaphorically speaking, create the weather conditions that are conducive for it to strike. To illustrate the principle of abduction, Reichertz (2004) refers to a story told by Peirce (1929): Peirce is on board a ship, and his watch, which he has borrowed from a friend, is stolen. Everyone on board the ship is told to line up and Peirce walks from one to the next, interrogating every one of them about the watch, but after having gone through the entire row, he still has no clue as to who stole it. He turns

around for a moment and realises that he *must* find the watch. All of a sudden, the answer comes to him, and he just *knows* who the thief is and his sudden knowledge turns out to be right. This “detective-like” mode (Reichertz, 2004) in which it is imperative to find a solution is suggested as a “weather condition” which might allow for new understanding and knowledge to arise.

A different mode, referred to by Reichertz (2004) as the “daydreamer”, involves a more meditative way of “waiting” for new knowledge and understanding to arise than the “detective mode”, however, in both cases, the reliance on logical rules and procedures is “outmaneuvered” (Reichertz, 2004, p. 162, author’s emphasis). This implies that the process does not follow a linear system characterised by a cause-and-effect kind of logic, but rather, it involves qualities such as creativity and intuition. Creating the “weather conditions” that might allow lightening to strike, that is, arranging for new understanding and meaning to arise, is not a one-time procedure, but rather, a continuous process of shifting between modes and perspectives and moving between the parts and the whole by means of various techniques, as described in the previous section.

A core aspect of abduction is its way of relating to pre-existing theory, while at the same time allowing for new theory to emerge. Although abduction incorporates both induction and deduction, it is proposed that it moves beyond the two modes of reasoning (Reichertz, 2004; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Whereas induction is about gathering data and analysing it to challenge or reinforce existing theories, deduction involves suggesting a hypothesis from the perspective of established theories and then verifying or disproving this hypothesis according to the empirical data (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Whereas both the inductive and deductive modes of reasoning confirm or invalidate already established knowledge in complementary ways, abduction involves a creative element in that it “*produces a new hypothesis for which we then need to gather more observations*” (Tavory & Timmermans, p. 5). Abduction allows for new knowledge and new theory to emerge: it combines elements that have not been brought together before (Reichertz, 2004). According to Tavory and Timmermans (2014), theories arise from the process of reducing data and “*extending it to other sights, other phenomena, and other potential research subjects*” (p. 2). In other words, the analysis process is about reduction and extension, deconstruction and reconstruction. It is a creative, constructive process of dynamically moving between empirical data and theoretical suggestions in which

theory makes it possible to see, understand and explain things in the data, and the data “*pushes the theorization in unexpected directions*” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 2).

An example of the abductive strategy relating to this project might be when Morris, one of the leaders in one of the focus groups, says that after having been through the coaching course, he has become more patient. However, in analysing the story subsequently told by this leader to exemplify this experience, this event has been interpreted as illustrative of an experience of self-confidence and commitment to the coaching approach to leadership. The essential meaning of lived experience does not necessarily reveal itself at first glance in the text. Rather, as shown above, searching for central meanings of the lived experience of a phenomenon is a process of “*actively waiting*” (Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 23) for the phenomenon to appear. In the encounter with the text, a phenomenological-hermeneutical analytical strategy might be to continuously ask questions such as: *what kind of experience is expressed in this part of the text?*

Merleau-Ponty (1960/1964) introduces the idea of the “ontological cipher” of the lived experience; referring to the existential, universal human experience as it is expressed in the particular experience. According to Hansen (2012), the universal element of the experience is not superior to the particular and concrete experience which is expressed in the text, but rather, it is exactly through this concrete, particular experience that the universal and common experience is expressed. However, as proposed earlier in this chapter, bracketing or bridling initial prejudice, pre-assumptions and pre-understanding with respect to the phenomenon is imperative so that the analysis does not become a projection of the researcher’s own feelings and experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). For instance, in the analysis of the story told by Morris in the above example, his story is interpreted as conveying an experience of self-confidence. However, if such a conclusion had been a mere reflection of the researcher’s own experience, for instance, “*in such a situation, I would have felt confident about myself, therefore the essential meaning of this story is an experience of self-confidence*”, this interpretation would have relapsed into speculation. As stated above, the adequacy of the interpretation is determined by its inner coherence and consistency, and by the way in which the parts relate to the whole (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; Westlund, 2009).

In the following, issues connected to the writing of the analytical text will be presented and discussed.

4.4.2.8. Writing the analytical text

The quality of a qualitative analysis is to a large degree determined in the interplay between the reader of the analytical text and the text itself (Tracy, 2010; van Manen, 1997). Through the presentation of the analysis, the researcher aims to evoke the lived experience in such a way that the reader can, so to speak, live the experience whilst reading the text. It is therefore suggested that the text should be presented in a poetic, evocative way (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004). Tracy (2010) proposes that the quality of the text is determined by its “aesthetic merit”, its ability to affect the reader: “*Like a good song or good piece of pie (...) it surprises, delights, and tickles something within us*” (p. 845). Whereas scientific language has a tendency to gloss over lived experience, everyday experience-related words are well suited to convey it (Lindseth & Nordberg, 2004; van Manen, 1997). However, even a qualitatively excellent research report cannot give *direct insight* into the lived experience of the informants (Ponterotto, 2006). However, the researcher can aim at creating a text in which the phenomenon can appear to the reader in a lively, evocative way so that she can imagine what this particular experience is like (Tracy, 2010).

The concept of the “thick description” might illuminate this purpose further. This term was coined by Gilbert Ryle (1949) and further developed by Geertz (1973)³⁵ (Ponterotto, 2006). A thick description is, needless to say, the opposite of the thin description, which merely states, or reports “*facts or occurrences*” (Denzin, 2001, p. 9). Such thin descriptions can be found in common everyday utterances, such as “*I am in a hurry*”, or, as exemplified by Denzin (2001), “*I’m sick of him!*”, which are comments without further explanations and where explanations are not asked for because we often take their meaning for granted. A thick description searches to describe events and behaviours in relation to their contexts, and tries to understand their intentionality and grasp their possible meaning (Ponterotto 2006). The purpose of a thick description is to “*bring lived experience before the reader*” (Denzin, 2001, p. 5).

³⁵ Geertz first put the entire expression into brackets, whereas Ryle (1949) wrote about “thick” descriptions (Ponterotto, 2006).

A thick description does not “gloss” over events by applying “second-order terms” (Denzin, 2001). Such words are experience-distant in that they do not manage to recreate the lived experience, rather, the experience which one tries to grasp is “glossed” over by theoretical constructs (Denzin, 2001). The search for thick descriptions can thus be understood as finding the balance between the presentation of events and the interpretative text, where the ultimate aim is to create a realistic description where the researcher opens “*a space for the reader to imagine his or her way into the life experiences of another*” (Denzin, 2001, p. 5). Van Manen (1991) uses the term phenomenological “nod”; when reading the phenomenological text, the reader nods instinctively because a feeling of resonance, recognition and identification emerges. The description creates a feeling in the reader of having experienced what is being described (Denzin, 2001, p. 6).

In this project, I aim to present the lived experience of the phenomenon coaching leadership through thick descriptions. For instance, when the experience of self-confidence is analysed and presented, the purpose is to contextualise and interpret the quotes from the informants in a way that invites the reader to live the experience through reading the text (Denzin, 2001). This does not mean that the reader involuntarily becomes more self-confident by reading an analytical text about self-confidence. Rather, it implies that the text is written in such a way that the reader recognises and acknowledges the feeling of self-confidence in the interpretive text. Furthermore, it means that through the thick descriptions, the interpretations and their argumentations, it seems reasonable to the reader that such an interpretation has been made and that the presented excerpts from the data might be understood as reflecting an experience of self-confidence.

Aspects of the analytical process that have unfolded in this project have thus been presented and discussed in relation to theoretical concepts. In the last section of this chapter, issues relating to the quality of qualitative research will be outlined and discussed.

4.5. Quality of qualitative research

Determining the quality of qualitative research includes a multitude of variables (Larsson, 2005; Tracy, 2010). Whereas in quantitative research the quality of a study can be measured by factors such as reliability and validity issues of quality in qualitative research are more multifaceted and ambiguous (Golafshani, 2003; Winter, 2000). Quality cannot be ensured by following a step-wise procedure (Tracy, 2010) in much the same way as practising scales on the violin does not inevitably result in great music. However, just as the indefatigable repetitions of scales might enhance the opportunity to play beautifully, knowledge and consideration of various quality criteria might increase the possibility of producing research of good quality.

Without ideas and conceptions on the quality of the research, the researcher cannot produce good research (Larsson, 2005). Larsson (2005) suggests that such conceptions run the risk of becoming private unless communicated and discussed openly in the research community. Clarification and communication of criteria of quality might increase the dialogue between different research paradigms within the world of research, as well as enhance understanding in surrounding areas and instances where qualitative methodology might be unfamiliar, such as “*grant agencies, governmental officials, and media contacts*” (Tracy, 2010, p. 838). Furthermore, being explicit about the quality criteria according to which the research has been carried out is a way of clarifying the research position taken and helping the reader make judgements about the quality of the text. Moreover, quality criteria can guide the novice researcher in developing qualitatively good practices (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, & Athanasiou, 1986). One is advised to proceed with care, however, as such criteria must not become “straitjackets”, restraining the unique project from unfolding according to its own logic (Bochner, 2000; Larsson, 2005). In the following, aspects that are considered important in relation to the quality of qualitative research are discussed.

4.5.1. Transparency and reflexivity

A central quality criterion of qualitative research is related to issues of transparency and reflexivity (Fejes & Thornberg, 2009; Finlay, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010;). Reflexivity, which has also been addressed earlier in this chapter, is about revealing information that is relevant to understanding the research process and findings, and to determining the quality of the study (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005; Tracy,

2010). However, the research report is not considered an arena for the researcher's own catharsis (Krizek, 1993). Principally, the researcher's personal self-disclosure is not relevant for the text in its own right, but rather, its purpose is to clarify information relevant to the understanding of the research findings (Krizek, 1993; Tracy, 2010).

The principle of transparency implies that the research process should not appear as a "black box" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010), as mentioned in the section above on reflexivity and the role of the researcher. Being clear about how the analytical process has emerged and has made the reflections overt, the process that has led to choices and selections being made along the way is therefore important, as well as reflections on the role of the researcher in terms of how biases and personal experience contribute to influencing the emergent knowledge (Finlay, 2002; Tracy, 2010). Such information includes the reader in the process and invites her to make her own considerations about the emerging results, which in turn enhances the credibility of the study (Finlay, 2002; Larsson, 2005, Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005). Being transparent involves, for instance, exposing dilemmas, paradoxes and difficulties that have arisen along the way, rather than omitting them. Elements, which might at first glance seem like noise in the research process, in that they do not seem to fit into the analysis, might be displayed and reflected on, rather than pretending that they do not exist. Finding a way of including such irregularities in the process and making them overt strengthens the transparency and thus the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Tracy, 2010).

In this study, I have tried to show how the analytical process has emerged (see section 4.4 above), and attempted to be transparent about the difficulties and challenges I encountered along the way. Likewise, I have in Chapter 5 tried to be as transparent as possible by displaying my analytical thinking on how the various categories and subcategories relate to one another, and to the wholeness of the data. I have tried to be clear along the way about how the interpretations have emerged, and I have also suggested alternative interpretations. When there has been disturbance, dissonance or irregularity, I have tried to include these in the analytical text and show how they relate to the analysis.

For example, the subcategory "junction" has been through a long journey of revisions. At one stage in the process it was called "coherence", and I tried to make things fit in such a way that all the statements in this category pointed in the same

direction, which made it seem as though the leaders in the study all experienced that coaching and leadership were the most obvious companions. The account from James seemed like an includable irregularity in that he had been through a process where in the end he arrived at the same kind of experience as the other leaders. However, the experience expressed by a few persons in one of the focus-group interviews seemed to point in the opposite direction and in this way undermined the entire subcategory.

For a while I considered excluding these accounts because the informants in question did not have any direct reports, and some of them were not in leader positions while attending the coaching course (see section 4.2.1.2 above). However, omitting this experience felt disturbing to the extent that I eventually had to find a way of including it. This is also part of the reason why the initial selection criteria have been modified. Because of this, I was “sent back to the drawing board” to renew my thinking about this specific subcategory, which was finally entitled “junction”. Sharing these and other reflections on critical aspects of the process are believed to enhance the transparency of the study and thus strengthen its quality.

4.5.2. Coherence

The quality of a qualitative study is determined to a large extent by its coherence (Dreyer & Pedersen, 2009; Fejes & Thornberg, 2009; Larsson, 2005). As clearly expressed by Tracy (2010), this implies that the study “*hangs together well*” (p. 848). In a coherent study, the structure of the text follows an internal logic and there is a harmonious balance and coherence between research question, methodology the phenomenon in question, the data and the analysis that has been carried out (Larsson, 2005; Tracy, 2010). In this study the issue of coherence has been a guiding element in the construction of the text. For instance, the structure has been probed and re-probed through acquiring a significant amount of feedback from various readers at different stages of the process. To guide the reader through the thesis, I have attempted to actively meta-communicate by introducing the main ideas of the text to come at in the beginning of each section, and by briefly summarising the essence of the text at the end of each main section.

4.5.3. Transferability, resonance and naturalistic generalisation

The knowledge constructed in qualitative research always relates to its context; it is “*historically and culturally situated*” (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). Hence, the results of a qualitative study do not claim to be statistically generalisable in terms of, for instance, being able to predict future events (Høyer, 2011; Tracy, 2010). Rather, it is suggested that the findings have been contextualised in such a way that “*the knowledge produced in a specific interview situation might be transferred to different, relevant situations*” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, p. 265, my translation). For example, the transfer of the experienced meaning of a phenomenon occurs in accordance with its resonance with the experience of the reader, as shown in the section on thick descriptions above. This kind of transferability has been labelled “naturalistic generalisation” (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). To open for naturalistic generalisation, the researcher might follow the principle of showing rather than telling (Tracy, 2010). This means that the generalisation occurs intuitively by reading the text rather than being imposed on the reader: “*the readers make choices based on their own, intuitive understanding of the scene, rather than feeling as though the research report is instructing them what to do*” (Tracy, 2010, p. 845).

This thesis has emerged in a continuous cycle of writing, receiving feedback – from supervisors, colleagues and peers who have been invited to read parts of the text – and re-writing. In the finalising phase, a professor from a different institution who has not been involved in the process read through the entire thesis and commented on various aspects of the text. The study has been orally presented in local research groups and at an international conference, as well as in external organisations. I believe that these elements contribute to strengthening the transferability, resonance and naturalistic generalisation of the study, as well as its general quality.

4.5.4. Translation of the interview excerpts

As mentioned in section 4.2.4.1 above, all the excerpts from the interviews presented in Chapter 5 have been translated from Norwegian into English by me, as have all the quotes from Norwegian literature. However, all these translations have been quality checked by a professional proof-reader, who has also proof-read the entire thesis. This is a Canadian who lives in Norway and has thorough knowledge of the Norwegian language. Ensuring that the meaning of the excerpts from the interviews is maintained to the highest degree possible by checking that the language of the informants is as

close to every-day English speech as possible has been an important element in the quality assurance of the study, and this dimension is therefore repeated here.

4.6. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented principles of phenomenological-hermeneutic research and reflections on the ontological and epistemological position of this study. The qualitative design of the study has then been outlined. The course from which the informants have been recruited has been described, as has the selection process and the group of informants. Issues of reflexivity and the role of the researcher have been discussed and aspects of the semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews have been described. Ethical considerations have been discussed, the principles and procedure of the hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis have been outlined and quality criteria of qualitative research have closed the chapter.

5. Presentation and analysis of the findings

This chapter presents the analysis of the essential meaning of the experience of coaching leadership as it appears in the data in this study. This phenomenological-hermeneutical analysis responds to the research question: “*How is coaching leadership experienced by leaders, and how does coaching influence leadership?*” In this analysis, three main categories stand out as the most conspicuous aspects of the experience of coaching leadership: self-confidence, integration and connectedness. The self-confidence category consists of three subcategories: confirmation, commitment and mastery. Furthermore, the integration category is divided into the subcategories personal change, coachability and junction. Finally, the connectedness category contains the subcategories care, influence and enrichment. These main categories and subcategories will be presented and analysed in the following. A discussion of the findings in relation to relevant theory and previous research is provided in the following discussion chapter. This means, as noted in the previous chapter, that in cases where the experience of coaching leadership as it appears in the leaders’ accounts seems to contradict the idea of coaching and coaching leadership presented in Chapters 2 and 3, this is not commented on in this chapter, but will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.1. Self-confidence

One of the most important aspects of the meaning of the experience of coaching leadership seems to be the feeling of self-confidence. The leaders in this study express an experience of feeling self-confident as a consequence of learning about and bringing coaching into their leadership practice. At the time of the interview, all the leaders seemed particularly confident about using what they have learned in the course setting in the context of their leadership. Some of them express an *increase* in self-confidence as a consequence of learning about and using coaching, whereas for others, self-confidence is rather *confirmed* and *reinforced*. Self-confidence is in this context related to an experience of feeling safe, at ease, competent and enabled. The knowledge, practice and experience of coaching related to the coaching course that the leaders have been through and the subsequent experimentation with what they have learned in their respective organisations has enhanced or reinforced their self-

confidence. Self-confidence is expressed in various ways and this experience will be presented below through the subcategories confirmation, commitment and mastery.

5.1.1. Confirmation

In this subcategory, self-confidence is related in different ways to an experience of confirmation. Here the noun confirmation implies both an experience of being accepted and confirmed as a person, and an experience of coherence between one's leadership experience and coaching.

For Peter, coaching, as it is presented through lectures, and as it is talked about and trained in the course setting,³⁶ seems to correspond with his leadership experience and thus confirms that has done something “*right*”. His leadership is in this sense legitimated in the course setting:

I believe that the course in many ways gave me confirmation that I was, in all modesty, doing a lot of things right - which I got confirmed - before I took the course, like.

This excerpt from the interview indicates that Peter feels reassured that he is doing something “*right*” because this has now been confirmed in the context of the coaching course. This might imply that in the course setting, he recognised the theories he had learned and the skills he had trained in by tracking them back to his leadership practice. It seems like beliefs and values expressed by the teachers and participants in the course and by the coaching theory are in accordance with his beliefs and values related to leadership, and that the course thus confirmed his earlier leadership practice, strategy and philosophy. However, this excerpt might also imply that for him the course was confidence inspiring, where his own leadership practice functions as confirmation of the course. As he sees a leadership discourse in the course setting which, based on his leadership practice, seems to suit his idea of leadership perfectly, the trustworthiness and credibility of the course are perhaps confirmed.

A different aspect of confirmation is expressed in the data from leaders who realise that in the encounter with the coaching discourse in the course setting, the

³⁶ These elements will henceforth be referred to as the “coaching discourse”. The coaching discourse, which arose in the coaching course, can be described as the sum of assumptions, beliefs, norms and values emerging from theory, lectures, discussions, reflections and experience.

ideas expressed provide a conceptual and theoretical framework for understanding what they have been doing previously in their leadership. As expressed by Shaun in one of the focus-group interviews:

Well, what I experience is that I might have been doing coaching without knowing what it was! For me it's about seeing people, and that they are treated with respect; experience that they actually make a difference.

Here Shaun connects his earlier leadership practice to coaching. In the first sentence he expresses an emergent feeling through the phrase "*I might have*" in comparing his leadership practice and what he has now learned about coaching. Due to the coaching course, things he would earlier have referred to as "*seeing people, and that they are treated with respect; experience that they actually make a difference*" can now be referred to as "*coaching*". In this sense, the coaching terminology makes the pieces fall into place: it provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for explaining something he feels that he has already been doing. However, contrary to what is expressed in the above excerpt from Peter, the experience of confirmation is not in this case related to the *legitimation* of earlier experience, but rather, the experience is about placing implicit and tacit knowledge into a theoretical, conceptual and linguistic system.

Whereas the two above excerpts express in different ways a sense of self-confidence through confirmation of earlier leadership practice, confirmation related to coaching leadership is also conveyed on a more personal and existential level. As opposed to what has been interpreted from the excerpts above, Henry's earlier leadership practice was characterized by an experience of insecurity and uncertainty. He says in the interview that he had a feeling of "*fumbling in the dark*", and had therefore explicitly demanded some kind of formal leadership development from his leaders. However, his initial idea of leadership development was about increasing his competence within economics or human-resources management. When he was given the opportunity to attend a coaching course, his motivation and expectations were low. However, his experience of the course turned out to be positive. When asked in the interview to say something about the most important thing he learned in the course, he says:

What happened there was that I got an incredible amount of credibility for my way of being, that's how I feel. That I got so much positive, you know, feedback on how I am and what I contribute and things like that. Or how open and honest I was, or what I shared and things like that. This...I've been thinking a lot less over the past year that I don't manage things, that I'm useless, or that I bother myself all the time with low self-esteem and a bad self-concept and things like that. I've been thinking about this much, much less over the past year than I used to because I feel that this was a recurring theme for me. That I talked a lot about it. Insecurity related to own job and things like that. I haven't bothered myself that much with this over the past year, I must say (...) I guess I'm more confident that I've made lots of right choices after all.

In this excerpt Henry seems to relate coaching leadership to an experience of feeling accepted and confirmed as a human being. The phrases "*credibility for my way of being*" and "*feedback on how I am*" allude to an experience of feeling accepted as a whole person. Henry connects this confirmation to his way of being in the course setting: "*the things I contribute and things like that. Or how open and honest I was, or what I shared and things like that*". The experience of confirmation is related to whom he is, or whom he chooses to be in the course setting: an open and honest person who shares personal experience. It seems that by being confirmed as a person, his self-confidence increases in his role as a leader. This indicates that the reason why he had been "*fumbling in the dark*" was not due to limited knowledge and competence in specific areas of leadership, but rather, due to the fact that his "*self-esteem*" and "*self-concept*" were poor. By being confirmed as a person in his encounter with the coaching discourse and the coaching course, Henry feels more confident about himself as a person, and thus also about himself as a leader. This increased self-confidence has prevented him from now thinking that he does not "*manage things*", or that he is "*useless*". Moreover, it also makes him interpret earlier actions and choices in his leadership retrospectively from a different angle. With a more self-confident perspective, he does not only see a leader who has been "*fumbling in the dark*", but also one who has "*made lots of right choices, after all*". Because he now has a more confident view of himself, he believes that the person he is, cannot be seen as being so useless as he thought and therefore his actions and choices cannot have been, or will not be, all wrong "*after all*".

The experience of confirmation as a leader and as a person has thus been presented as an aspect of self-confidence. In the following, a different dimension of self-confidence, commitment, will be described.

5.1.2. Commitment

One dimension of the self-confidence category is commitment, that is, the trust and belief in the coaching approach to leadership that is expressed by the leaders in this study. They convey a belief in the tools, techniques and overall approach that they have learned in the coaching course, and believe in its potential usefulness in the leadership context. Bearing this in mind, commitment is thus related to self-confidence in that the leaders have gained knowledge and experience related to an approach that seems trustworthy and reasonable, and due to this knowledge they feel better equipped to perform well as leaders. The leaders seem confident that the tools they have learned are worth believing in and testing in their leadership. This feeling of commitment, trust and belief could be related to the experiential design of the course; the leaders are encouraged in the course setting to test specific tools and techniques through numerous exercises, and they are given feedback on their performance as coaches. For this reason, one possible interpretation might be that bringing the same tools and techniques into a different setting – the leadership context – might not appear as uncomfortable as might have been the case if the knowledge and competence acquired in the course had been solely based on theoretical knowledge.

For Easton, the experience of commitment to the coaching approach to leadership is conveyed through an expression of enthusiasm about the tools he has learned and the possibilities they add to his leadership practice. In the following excerpt, he refers to a coaching conversation in the course setting and talks about discoveries he made in the role of coach:

A lot of fun to learn about methods, great fun! Ask, well, sit calmly and just: I have no idea of what...what are you driving at! This, I think is great fun, actually. It was you, the coachee who raised the issue. I knew nothing about it, but oh my God, I could ask you a whole lot about it!

Here Easton expresses enthusiasm about experimenting with and exploring the role of the coach in the course setting. He uses descriptions such as “*a lot of fun*” and “*great fun*” several times, which allude to discoveries he made during these coaching conversations. For instance, he discovered that even though he had no knowledge

about the theme in question, “*I knew nothing about it*”, he could ask a lot of questions about the issue. The phrase “*oh my God!*” accentuates a feeling of surprise about not struggling to find something to say even though the issue was unfamiliar to him. It seems like he has discovered a new way of approaching a conversation through experimenting in the course setting, and this makes him enthusiastic and leads to an experience of commitment to the coaching concept.

At the time of the interview Easton had just finished the course. The conversation was characterised by a future-oriented perspective: much of the time, he reflected on the possibilities offered to him through coaching – in the context of his leadership practice. Specifically, he was thinking about a conversation with an employee, which was scheduled a few days after the interview, and reflected on opportunities to use coaching “*tools*” in this conversation:

Using all the different tools, sort of, well, the role play, the gestalt way of thinking, the creating the energy which I am searching for a little bit! I think that’s fun! But it’s also challenging, the *timing* of it, the sensitivity: when is role play suitable? I think this has a lot to do with experience, but I feel like trying to jump right into it, a little bit, and, sort of, staying open to...if I sense that the role play doesn’t really work out and it’s not very...this wasn’t suitable, we just stop! We just turn the whole thing around and we’re back again, kind of.

Easton expresses enthusiasm about “*using all the different tools, sort of*” by saying “*I think that’s fun*”. It seems like the background for his enthusiastic experience of testing tools in the coaching course is that he also feels like “*trying to jump right into it*” in his leadership. The testing of coaching tools in his everyday life as a leader does not seem risky for him. On the contrary, the idea of being sensitive to what does and does not “*work out*” is a reassurance for him. He trusts that the “*challenge*” of finding the right “*timing*” will diminish as he becomes more experienced. He conveys an eagerness to gain this experience within his leadership, and he expresses confidence that this experience will arise, eventually, if he dares to “*jump right into it*”. The self-confidence and commitment expressed by the wish to test the coaching tools in his leadership might thus be related to both the discoveries he made in-action as a coach in the course setting and to the idea that he can always “*stop*”, and “*turn the whole thing around*”. The last part of the sentence, the “*turning around*”, is in this context interpreted as another way of expressing that he can always stop and recapitulate if he discovers during a conversation that the coaching approach does not

seem adequate or helpful. This possibility is interpreted as his safety net, metaphorically speaking, which means that he does not feel that “*jumping right into it*” is risky.

One of the focus-group informants, Morris, conveys the experience of commitment in a different way. Whereas Easton seems to be on the verge of something new, almost like a base jumper confidently getting ready to jump over the edge, although with a “*safety net*”, commitment to the coaching approach is, in this case, expressed in a situation where Morris challenges his boss and his own previous way of thinking by choosing a radically different approach than he would have chosen before. He mentions an employee who has been causing problems in Morris’ department for a while by acting peripherally in the group of employees, not participating in work-related processes, forgetting things and generating customer complaints. Before calling the employee on the carpet, he discusses the upcoming meeting with his boss:

My boss was all set: “*we’ll do it like this, and that’s it. Yes, I said, I’m not so sure about that*”. But a year ago, I totally would have agreed: “*We’ll walk in, and we’ll cut...well, not literally, but, we’ll decapitate him, and we’ll give him some clear feedback; either it works, or it doesn’t work. And if this doesn’t work now, from here on out, you’re out! And there’s the door!*” But after having been through the coaching course, I was thinking: “*No, that’s probably not so smart. We’ll have to try to walk down a slightly different path*”.

When Morris says: “*I’m not so sure about that*”, or “*that’s probably not so smart*”, this could have implied uncertainty and insecurity about which choices to make in the upcoming situation. However, in light of everything Morris says, these phrases rather seem like a polite and careful way of challenging his boss’ view, which is interpreted as an expression of self-confidence and commitment to the coaching approach. While discussing the case with his boss, he challenges the boss’ clear advice by suggesting a different way of approaching the upcoming situation. Morris explicitly links this alternative approach to the coaching course: “*after having been through the coaching course*” his perspective has changed, and he is thinking: “*no, that’s probably not so smart*”.

Moreover, “*a slightly different path*” seems like an understatement because the discrepancy between the metaphor “*decapitation*” and what he expresses that he actually did seems quite significant. His chosen path was that he “*asked him to open*

up”, “*not taking no for an answer*” and he would “*dig into it a bit, between, get a little bit behind the scene*”. An alternative interpretation is that the decapitation metaphor is an exaggeration used to illuminate the contrast in his experience: the feeling of a radical change in his way of thinking. This contrast might also shed light on a different aspect: By introducing “*a slightly different approach*” he might be challenging the culture in his workplace. Since the suggested approach is different from both Morris’ former way of thinking and the attitude expressed by his boss, this could be an expression of a common way of thinking in his work culture. If this is the case, it probably takes even more self-confidence to challenge such established views and norms in the company. In either case, this excerpt indicates that the coaching course has taught Morris about an approach that he believes in and feels so committed to that he is willing to challenge his boss and radically change his way of thinking and approaching leadership situations in his company.

In the other focus-group session a similar experience of commitment to and trust and belief in the coaching approach is expressed by some of the leaders when they are discussing power issues and ethical themes relating to coaching leadership. In this conversation, one of the leaders calls coaching a “*powerful tool*”, alluding to situations that might arise while using coaching in conversations with employees. In the subsequent discussion, the informants in the group reflect on whether, as a consequence of a coaching approach, one might risk pushing employees into situations where they reveal more information than they are comfortable sharing with their leader. In this conversation, one of the leaders, Adam, expresses the opposite concern, suggesting that one risks more as a leader by not being able to “*see*” and “*follow up*” employees:

I had a case here, which was about a person who is now actually out of the organisation, because we haven’t been able to follow him up. Anyway, something like that, and where, sort of, there is a clear lack of leadership, support, or whatever. So it became very evident that oops! If this had been intercepted, there might have been a completely different outcome. And I think this is probably more the rule. That we *don’t* see our employees, we don’t notice things. And this results in people leaving, getting ill, or whatever. So I think the risk that we, so to speak, are in very deep water, not being able to get back to shore, is much less after we’ve learned more about this.

Here Adam describes a case where they have not *“been able to follow up”* the person in question. He seems to express a reassurance that if he were to face a similar situation, he now feels better equipped to ensure that a negative outcome would be prevented. After he *“learned more about this”*, which probably refers to learning about coaching in the coaching course, he feels better able to *“follow up”* the employees and show *“leadership, support, or whatever”*. Adam expresses that *“the rule”* is an approach where *“we don’t see our employees, don’t notice things”*. This could refer to the prevailing norm in his company, or more broadly, to how he perceives the leadership norm in society as a whole. Adam seems to link coaching to the ability to challenge this approach. *“Learning more about this”* makes him more self-confident in relation to handling future situations within his leadership practice, and is, as such, an expression of commitment to the coaching approach to leadership.

For Christian, the experience of bringing coaching into his leadership involves feeling clearer about which choices to make as a leader and how to prioritise his time. He mentions a situation when he was challenged to take on a specific task in the company, which involved spending a significant amount of time learning specific skills. In the interview he expresses that his role has become clearer to him as a consequence of learning about coaching. In this instance, he reflects on the opportunity to take a coaching approach so he can get the most out of the group he is working with and, also, to share responsibilities:

Christian: Maybe I can take a clearer role...which has a greater effect, you know, in relation to such a group dynamic.

Gunhild: Clearer role...what are you thinking about?

Christian: I’m thinking about my role as a coach and leader (...). I get the opportunity to take the coaching perspective so we can solve the issue we are facing as a group. Without me being left with the entire task and all the answers.

Gunhild: Yes? And then you take a clearer role?

Christian: That’s what I’m thinking, my role is simply to ensure that the potential that exists in the group is unlocked, if the issue is lying out here, but the group needs to resolve it. If I can contribute to releasing that energy, you know, like, the group dynamic.

Here Christian conveys that learning about coaching has made him more comfortable and assertive in defining and clarifying his role *“as a coach and a leader”*. Because he has been given *“the opportunity to take the coaching perspective”*, the group is given the ability and opportunity to solve work tasks, *“the issue we are facing as a*

group”, more effectively. It seems like his idea of his role as a leader has become clearer by learning about coaching, and this “*clearer role*” means that he can now be the facilitator who might “*ensure that the potential that exists in the group is unlocked*” and he can contribute to “*releasing that energy*” that is in the group. This involves sharing and delegating responsibility in such a way that he is not “*being left with the entire task and all the answers*”. His responsibility is now understood as sharing and delegating rather than performing the tasks or finding the answers on his own.

By using the adverb “*simply*” it sounds as if this is an easier, more straightforward role to have as a leader: learning about coaching and applying it to his leadership makes it easier to be a leader because taking the role of the facilitator is easier than providing the solutions and answers. Alternatively, the choice of the adverb “*simply*” might be pointing out a discovery he has made: his leader role has become clearer to him after he learned about coaching. It seems that having learned about coaching, it is easier to legitimate the facilitator role: he can now be more assertive in, for instance, not taking on tasks like the one described in the introduction to the excerpt, but rather, delegate such tasks to his employees. In the same way as with the other excerpts in this sub-category, this might be an expression of a commitment to the coaching approach, where leaders feel better equipped to perform in their role as leaders. The following section will look further into self-confidence through an experience of mastery.

5.1.3. Mastery

One aspect of self-confidence, as it appears in the analysis of this data, is the experience of mastery. By using a coaching approach, the leaders experience that solutions are found more easily or quickly, or that situations are solved in more efficient ways. This experience of mastery seems to entail an experience of self-confidence. In one of the focus-group interviews, Carrie talks about a planned conversation with an employee for which she had specific coaching techniques in mind. She wanted to test out tools and techniques that she had learned in the coaching course:

I entered the conversation aware of a purpose of really training my ability to stop being a listener at “level 1”,³⁷ but rather enter the “global listening” mode. And when I started the conversation, from this point of departure, I felt that I was able to gain a wider overview, and I could better grasp more of the issues, which were presented. And from there on, I managed to clarify some of the issues that were raised. And then ask: “*Are you ok with us moving on with this, this one theme?*” And I think this worked out very well, the conversation worked out very well, I got positive feedback afterwards, about having been helpful, you know. That the person in question saw new possibilities and saw different ways of being able to deal with her challenges. And this was a very positive experience.

This excerpt is an example of the experience of mastery. By taking a different approach than she previously had, being aware of trying to listen more “*globally*” rather than at “*level 1*”, Carrie acquired “*a wider overview*”, and she could “*better grasp more of the issues, which were presented*”. In this way she conveys an experience of having succeeded in what she was trying to accomplish. The word “*manage*” is used – she “*managed to clarify*” points in the direction of an experience of mastery. By saying: “*this worked out very well*”, and “*the conversation worked out well*”, she expresses that the outcome was positive: she handled the situation in an effective manner. This experience is additionally confirmed by the feedback she is given by her employee: “*I got positive feedback afterwards, about having been helpful, you know*”. Carrie concludes by saying “*this was a very positive experience*”. By testing out a coaching approach in the conversation, something positive happened: Carrie got positive feedback from her employee about having been helpful. Through the experience of mastery whilst taking a coaching approach to situations within the context of her leadership, Carrie seems to communicate a feeling of self-confidence in relation to coaching leadership.

In the same focus-group interview, Adam refers to a phone call he received from one of his employees during a break in the session, which lasted around 5-10 minutes. This occurred while he was in the middle of the second module of the course, and had therefore been training in coaching skills and coaching the entire day.

³⁷ Listening at “level 1” refers to the human tendency of confirming one’s own experience whilst listening to other people (Gjerde, 2010; Whitworth et al., 2009). We tend to understand what other people say in relation to our own experience, and our presence and interventions might not be helpful if we do not manage to transcend this “inner listening” in order to open up for an empathetic understanding of the other person’s lifeworld. The “global listening” mode implies the search for an empathetic understanding of the other person, where one’s responses and interventions are dimensioned to fit the other person’s lifeworld, rather than one’s own. In this mode, one manages to listen more holistically and look for information which is expressed “between the lines”, through body language, facial expressions and non-verbal expressions, such as pauses and the way in which things are expressed (Gjerde, 2010; Whitworth et al., 2009).

He decided to take a coaching approach in the conversation and expresses that: “*I realised that I became very aware*”. He describes the conversation in the following way:

Here, I was to be taken to task and asked for advice about something, a problem, where the conclusion was that the person in question, who had presented the problem, nearly concluded, and where, kind of...we just went through the problem, shed light on it, and then – because I didn’t have the necessary knowledge about what is right and wrong here, so I had to get it from the person in question. And then it became obvious that, yes! The answer is inside you. So I couldn’t do anything else than...I experienced that my role here was to really look at this from the different angles. Get down to what was most important, what was less important? And this person could put this into words, you know, because for him this was known, you see. But through the conversation, we worked through these problems, which made it clear that the answer was obvious, and it was in the employee and less within me. Then, closing the case was very easy. (...) I experienced that this was a good way of...getting some feedback from the other person as well, that yes, this really felt okay.

In this situation Adam did not fulfil the expectations of the employee, who was intending to “*take him to task*”, and “*ask for advice*”. Instead of providing answers to the issue presented or giving the advice he was being “*asked for*”, he chose to ask questions. The result was that the person in question “*nearly concluded*” himself. He expressed that he “*couldn’t do anything else than...*” which probably alludes to the fact that he “*didn’t have the necessary knowledge about what is right and wrong here*” and therefore “*had to get it from the person in question*”. These phrases could have implied that taking a coaching approach was the most obvious thing in the world and, for that matter, that this is what he had always done. However, Adam seems to express that such an approach was not necessarily an obvious choice. Since the employee was intending to “*take him to task*” and ask for “*advice*”, he could as well have responded by providing answers or solutions, although he “*didn’t have the necessary knowledge about what is right and wrong here*”:

Well, I could have jumped right in and said that “*I’ll suggest this!*” And then we probably could have talked...for sure, we could have taken some loops around that. And then I would have to defend, and he would have to explain, and then we could most certainly have gone in...but in my experience, the way in which we approached it now was...I was very much in control of the way we approached the situation.

Here Adam illustrates what could have been an alternative way of proceeding from the same starting point in the conversation described above. This response would probably have been a more direct fulfilment of the expectation of the employee, who “asked for advice about something”. Bearing this in mind, he could have given in to the expressed wish of the employee by “jumping right in”, saying “I’ll suggest this!” In the subsequent sentences, however, Adam suggests that such a path might not have led to the same feeling of mastery because the outcome of such an approach might have been that he would have had to “defend” the suggestion he had made. The verb “defending”, or being “defensive”, does not point in the direction of mastery, but rather the opposite: if Adam had “jumped right in” and suggested a solution, this might have backed him into a more defensive position where he could have been “attacked” by his employee to the extent that he would have had to “defend” himself. The way Adam describes the imagined outcome of the actual situation rather gives associations to destabilisation, insecurity, imbalance and disharmony than to an experience of mastery.

Furthermore, Adam suggests that asking questions implies a greater amount of control than giving advice. By asking questions, he expresses that: “I very much controlled the way we entered the situation”. This experience of controlling the initial part of the process might be linked to the fact that he “didn’t have the necessary knowledge about what is right and wrong here”. If he had, in spite of this lack of knowledge, “jumped right in” with suggested advice, he would have been on thin ice and would probably have had to “defend” himself. By asking questions, he did not have to focus on his limited knowledge because “then it became obvious that, yes! The answer lies inside you”. Paradoxically, as it might seem, by acknowledging the competence of the employee to solve the problem himself, Adam probably felt more competent himself because he did not need to lapse into a defensive position by “jumping right in” with advice which he really did not have the background to give. By asking questions, the problem solved itself in a way, or was solved by the employee. He concludes that this was a positive experience for both parties: “I experienced that this was a good way of...got some feedback from the other person as well, that yes, this really felt okay”. The positive feedback from his employee confirms and reinforces an experience of mastery: Adam and his employee arrived at a solution without him having to “jump right in” with advice or “defend” himself.

In his interview, James conveys an experience of self-confidence and mastery in relation to coaching leadership, in that he finds coaching useful and applicable to his leadership and expresses that coaching has become a “*guiding principle*” in his leadership. However, in the coaching course, coaching leadership was not at all an experience of mastery for James, but rather the opposite. He expresses that his self-confidence and experience of mastery regarding coaching leadership has been achieved through a process which might be characterised by such words as destabilisation, vulnerability, deconstruction and friction, both in a personal and theoretical sense.

This challenging experience arose due to the pedagogical design of the coaching course. Every participant had to train and perform in the role of the coach.³⁸ James explains:

James: This is one of the things which I thought was...terrible! (both chuckle) in the course. Where you, sort of, really hit the wall when it comes to what you're not good at. That really hits you, you know.

Gunhild: Yes... so *when* did you hit the wall...in the course? What happened then?

James: Well, I thought that those...many of those...what was it that we called them again? These...triads! That's what we called them. That was just awful. For me it was totally terrible.

Gunhild: Really?

James: Really terrible.

Gunhild: All the way through?

James: Yes, more or less (both chuckling). Because I've had this as a job for a while, you know, in slightly different roles. (...) So I've been doing this quite a lot, and I think to myself that I've made my way through this quite okay. Have received, sort of, decent feedback from people I've worked with, kind of, and....that, yes, they thought it was okay to come to me!

Here James describes the “*terrible*” feeling of being confronted with his shortcomings, “*what you're not good at*”, which might be understood as an expression of vulnerability. James has been more or less satisfied with his ability to conduct conversations with his employees before: “*I've made my way through this quite okay*”. Rather than using superlatives about his skills in this field, his language is rather modest: He describes the feedback he has received from employees as

³⁸ As mentioned in the methodology chapter above, this coaching training was given in so-called “triads”: groups of three participants who rotated in the role of the coach, the coachee and the observer. Real-life issues were presented by the coachee, the coach was supposed to train specific techniques which were presented in the preceding theoretical lecture, and the observer would observe the coach in action and give feedback to him or her after the 5-10-minute coaching sessions.

“decent”, and says that employees have said that “coming to him”, probably for conversations of various sorts, was “okay”. This might be an understatement: he wants to show humility and modesty and not brag about himself, and these words thus express that he has actually been *satisfied* with his capacity in this area. On the other hand, these words might express that he has judged himself as being *good enough* in this area.

At any rate, having conversations with his employees is a significant part of his work: “I’ve been doing this quite a lot”, and he has been more or less satisfied with his abilities in his role as interlocutor. This might be the reason why the experience of the triads is “awful” and “terrible” for him: it renders him vulnerable because he has experienced mastery in relation to being an interlocutor with his employees, he has thought he was “okay” – good, or good *enough*, when it comes to this part of his leadership practice, but in the course, whilst in the “spotlight”, he realises that maybe his conversational skills have not been that good after all: “you, sort of, really hit the wall, when it comes to what you’re not good at”. The experience of vulnerability, which might be an interpretation of these statements, might be linked to an experience of his self-confidence as a leader being destabilised, deconstructed and falling apart. However, as mentioned above, it seems that his self-confidence and experience of mastery related to coaching leadership have eventually been restored in that he expresses that coaching has become a “guiding principle” in his leadership practice.

The experience of mastery has here been presented as a subcategory of the main category self-confidence.

5.1.4. Summary of the self-confidence category

The experience of self-confidence has been analysed as an important aspect of the experience of coaching leadership, as expressed by the leaders in this study. It seems like learning about coaching and implementing coaching into one’s leadership contributes, in various ways, to becoming more self-confident as a leader. The experience of self-confidence is in this analysis divided into three subcategories: confirmation, commitment and mastery. In the confirmation subcategory, coaching leadership is about an experience of being confirmed as a leader through the encounter with the coaching course and the coaching discourse. Learning about coaching contributes, for some, to legitimising and conceptualising earlier leadership

experience, whereas for others, learning about coaching and applying this to one's leadership is mainly about feeling confirmed and accepted as a human being and thus also as a leader.

In the second subcategory of the self-confidence category: commitment, the experience of self-confidence related to coaching leadership is expressed by an experience of commitment to and belief and trust in the coaching approach to leadership. By learning about coaching, leaders seem to feel better equipped to perform their job as leaders and more confident about the choices they make. The last subcategory relating to self-confidence is understood as mastery, by using coaching in specific situations within leadership, leaders manage to make coaching work in their leadership contexts: they convey an experience of mastery, and this seems to entail an experience of self-confidence.

In the following, the second main category, integration, which in this analysis has stood out as a key component in the experience of coaching leadership, will be presented.

5.2. Integration

This category reflects a conspicuous dimension of coaching leadership as expressed by the leaders in this study: the experience of integration. This is an experience where coaching becomes a part of the leader's *being*, a part of who this person feels he or she *is*, and thus also a part of the feeling of whom one is *as a leader*. Another aspect of this is the experience of bringing coaching techniques into a large variety of situations, formal and informal, within the leadership context. However, this does not imply the aim of taking a coaching approach at all times and in all situations. This category is divided into three subcategories: personal change, coachability and junction, which will be presented and analysed below.

5.2.1 Personal change

In this category, the experience of integration is related to the feeling that in one way or another coaching leadership entails an experience of being influenced at the personal level. An experienced change within oneself has implications for how leaders experience their work context, as well as their private sphere. This is understood as an integrative experience in the sense that coaching entails an

experience of personal change, and this experience is also brought into the leadership context.

While asked in the interview about the most significant element which he has brought with him from the coaching course into his leadership practice, Larry expresses that he is now upset less often than he used to be:

Larry: Before, when there was tension, I was probably a bad ass many times in the lunchroom, I think, when we were done.

Gunhild: How?

Larry: Well, *“fuck!”* Sorry! (chuckles) *“Talking to him is totally impossible, because the guy gets mad!”*

Gunhild: Now you avoid doing that in the lunchroom afterwards?

Larry: Yes....I'm convinced that the conversations go differently, after having learned some of what we call coaching leadership. That it does something to you as a person, really.

This conveys an experience of being influenced on the personal level as a consequence of learning about coaching: *“(...) it does something to you as a person, really”*. Larry believes that the experienced change within himself is also noticeable for his employees: *“I am convinced that the conversations go differently,”* and he connects this experience to coaching leadership by saying: *“after having learned some of what we call coaching leadership”*. His earlier *“bad ass”* behaviour in the lunchroom might refer to a tendency to feel upset and to let this slide into other contexts after the termination of the conversation: *“when we were done”*.

In a different part of the interview, Larry expresses a similar insight into an experienced change being traceable by the people around him. He believes that he now brings his work home with him to a smaller degree than before, and hence, the people he lives with are witnesses to what he refers to as the *“benefit”* he has had from the coaching course. He states:

Earlier, I was likely to join the merry-go-round of adrenaline, and work myself up, when my counterpart did so as well. But not many people can do that to me anymore.

Gunhild: And then you brought the work home with you?

Larry: I.... yes, many times, I think I brought the adrenaline with me back home! And the work, and the cases, it all stuck in the brain!

Here Larry expresses that he does not bring the “*adrenaline*” home with him to the extent that he did before. “*Joining the merry-go-round of adrenaline*” seems to be another way of expressing that he would earlier get upset in conversations with employees and “*work himself up, when the opponent did so as well*”. The word “*adrenaline*” might be associated with a bustling bodily state, which is somehow the opposite of feeling harmonious, balanced and calm. Furthermore, the expression: “*it all stuck in the brain*” could be understood as an expression of being tormented, or haunted, by his work, also after he left the workplace. One interpretation might thus be that he experiences liberation from this bustling state of mind that had more influence on him before he attended the coaching course. According to this excerpt, bringing the work home with him was not about bringing paperwork or other kinds of specific tasks home after work, but rather, it was about not being able to disconnect mentally from work because of the “*adrenaline*”.

In the interview, Larry asked me to stop the tape-recorder as he shared an example of an employee who broke the work rules to such an extent that his behaviour could have been grounds for termination. We agreed that the essence of the story could be used, where I provided a summary when the tape-recorder was turned back on. The subsequent conversation unfolded in the following way:

Gunhild: If you had had this case two years ago....

Larry: Then I would not have handled it the way I've done now, never! I know myself way too well.

Gunhild: So then, you used some of the coaching material, in a way, or the stuff from coaching....

Larry: Yes, 'cause I....if this had been before the course, I probably would never have let him take the floor at all! Then his outcome would probably have been different than it is today!

(...)

Gunhild: Earlier you would have gone directly to termination, in a way?

Larry: I would have taken it to the bitter end.

Gunhild: Yes...whereas now you have...

Larry: I guess I have gotten topped up with a lot of professional knowledge in the way of being as a person, I believe! I've acquired the ability to maybe understand that this case has three sides, you know!

Gunhild: Yes...so now you could listen to his version?

Larry: Right. Yes. I would never have done that before.

Here Larry appears assertive and confident in claiming that coaching has entailed a change in the way he now approaches the leadership practice. He uses the word “*never*” three times, probably to underscore and convey his experience of having made choices which he would not have made before learning about coaching: “*before the course*”. When he says: “*No, I know myself too well*”, this seems like yet another way of amplifying his experience of being influenced as a person as a consequence of learning about coaching. Larry connects his experience of making choices differently from those he would have made before to coaching by alluding to the coaching course: “*if this had been before the course I probably would never have let him take the floor at all!*” Furthermore, he expresses that without him having learned about coaching and using his coaching skills to solve the situation: “*his (the employee’s) outcome would probably had been different than it is today!*” Larry confirms my question of whether he “*would have gone directly to termination*” before by stating: “*I would have taken it to the bitter end*”.

Furthermore, he connects this new way of thinking and acting within his leadership to coaching and links the topping up of “*professional knowledge*” to a personal change within himself: “*I guess I have had, in a way, topped up with a lot of professional knowledge in the way of being as a person, I believe*” In this excerpt, Larry expresses that the “*professional knowledge*” is linked to being influenced on the personal level when he says that he topped up with “*professional knowledge in the way of being as a person*”. It seems like the knowledge he learned in the course was both professional and personal because it influenced his way of being. For Larry, according to what he says above, the experience of coaching leadership seems to be one of personal change, an experienced change within himself that cannot be isolated from who he is. In this sense, he inevitably brings this experienced change with him into all kinds of situations as it follows him as a person.

A similar experience of personal change is expressed by Ralph. In the interview he talks about a conflict at work where, in retrospect, he feels uncertain about what he actually chose to do. He concludes:

Ralph: I feel a bit uncertain, you know, I'm not dead certain about anything at all!

Gunhild: Do you feel more uncertain now than before?

Ralph: No, no, I'm not...like, I feel here, you know, after the three trips³⁹ I've had now, I actually feel more comfortable and relaxed. I don't fear anything, really! I mean, I don't think I can solve anything, I don't, but I feel a lot more relaxed now than I've been before, in relation to talking to people, you know, and...yes, finding solutions so that people learn something and get on with things, you know.

Here Ralph expresses an experienced change on the personal level: *"I feel a lot more relaxed now than I've been before"*. Furthermore, he links this experience to the coaching course: *"I feel here, you know, after the three trips I've had now, I actually feel more comfortable and relaxed"*. Paradoxically, Ralph starts by expressing an experience of feeling *"uncertain"*, which is a different experience than feeling *"relaxed"*: *"I feel a bit uncertain, you know, I'm not dead certain about anything at all!"* When I ask: *"Do you feel more uncertain now than before?"* Ralph's response is therefore surprising: *"No, no, I'm not...like, I feel here, you know, after the three trips I've had now, I actually feel more comfortable and relaxed"*.

The feeling of insecurity about what he did in the conversation with his employees that he is referring to is thus not linked to an overall feeling of uncertainty. On the contrary, he generally feels *"more comfortable and relaxed"* than before the coaching course. One interpretation of this discrepancy is that the course has made him more aware that there is no single way of doing things; there is no right and wrong way in communicative situations. The experience of not being *"dead certain about anything"*, or feeling *"a bit uncertain"* might, from such a perspective, still be integrated in a more overall experience of feeling *"relaxed"* and *"confident"*. Ralph even expresses that he does not *"fear anything, really!"* This could mean that after having been through the course, he feels confident that there is nothing to be afraid of, even in situations where he does not feel *"dead certain"* about what to do. Feeling *"a bit uncertain"* is not threatening; there is nothing to be afraid of. This might involve the realisation and acceptance of the fact that being a leader does not necessarily imply feeling *"dead certain"* about anything.

In the last sentence of the excerpt Ralph expresses that his overall feeling of confidence is related to *"talking to people"*, and to his capacity to *"find solutions so*

³⁹ The three modules of the coaching course.

that people learn something and can get on with things". He conveys a general feeling of confidence related to his role as an interlocutor who can facilitate learning for the employees in his capacity of being the one to *"find solutions"* so that they can *"get on"*. This does not imply, however, that he always feels certain about what to do, which questions to ask or what to say. On the contrary, he is not *"dead certain"* about anything at all. However, he conveys an overriding experience of having become more *"confident"* and *"relaxed"* as a result of the coaching course. The experienced personal change, that of having become more *"comfortable"* and *"relaxed"* lies within himself, and he is therefore likely to bring this new experience with him into all kinds of situations. In this sense, this can be understood as an integrative experience.

In the interview with Andrew he describes himself as a person who easily rushes to conclusions and is eager to find solutions. This tendency has been challenged in the coaching course and he has experienced various positive consequences as a result of taking a more withdrawn position, holding back answers and asking more questions. This is an approach that he has found valuable in many situations at work, but also in other life arenas, such as his private sphere, for example communicating with his children. In the following, Andrew describes how coaching has become a part of how he sees himself as a person:

I feel that I have some conversations that are coaching, but as a leader I don't feel any different, or that I have an on and off switch and things like that, it's not like that. It's probably rather a part of what I do or who I am (...). I don't feel any division there, you know, it doesn't feel like that.

In this excerpt Andrew expresses that the role of the coaching leader is not something he explicitly enters into and exits; he does not feel like he has *"an on and off switch and things like that"*, and *"as a leader"* he *"doesn't feel any different"* when he coaches and when he does not. In this sense, coaching leadership is communicated as an integrative experience where coaching is integrated into his personality: *"probably rather a part of what I do or who I am"*. Andrew links coaching to his entire being: who he feels he is as a person: *"who I am"*. It seems like learning about and using coaching has influenced him on the personal level.

The first part of the excerpt expresses a key element in this category: the integrative experience of coaching leadership does not imply that the leaders replace

any other intervention by coaching in leadership situations. Although Andrew expresses that coaching has become a part of what he does and who he is, he does not consider all conversations or situations within his leadership practice as coaching: “*I feel that I have some conversations that are coaching*”. The integrative experience implies, in this instance, that he does not feel a “*division*” or a boundary within himself in shifting between the different approaches. Coaching has influenced him on a personal level: it has led to the experienced personal change, and he brings this new self into all kinds of situations and various life arenas.

The subcategory personal change has been presented above, and in the following, the coachability subcategory will be explained.

5.2.2. Coachability

In this subcategory, the integrative experience of coaching leadership is manifested by the way in which the leaders reflect in the interviews on conditions or situations within their leadership practice that they do not find compatible with coaching. However, in this process, they reflect on whether there might be conditional possibilities where they could take a coaching approach on these conditions, or in these situations, just the same. The conditional possibility of taking a coaching approach in a situation is, in this instance, called the “*coachability*” of a situation. In some cases, the leaders begin by stating that in such and such a situation coaching is impossible, unfavourable or unnecessary. However, they “flip the coin” and start looking for the coachability of the situations in question. This might be interpreted as the opposite of an integrative experience as there is a dilemma or a paradox in the situation that needs to be resolved. On the other hand, this might be seen as an expression of an integrative experience in that the leaders are in fact searching for integration through the reflective conversation and not really rejecting the opportunity to take a coaching approach in given situations. They are rather searching for a way in which coaching can be integrated in a large variety of situations within their leadership practice. However, the experience of searching for the coachability of situations does not imply that coaching becomes everything the leaders do, but rather, they find aspects of a large variety of situations which might open for taking a coaching approach.

In one of the focus-group sessions Carrie reflects on a situation in which she conveys information to her employees:

I don't see a contradiction in being a leader and having a coaching attitude because it's about...well, one thing is telling people how things are going to be, but the possibility is there to enter the situation with a coaching attitude, and being attentive to the person you are giving instructions to, for instance. How does he react, has he understood? Ask control questions; is there anything uncomfortable about it? Things like that. And then, one is making the most out of coaching leadership.

Here, in the initial statement: *"I don't see a contradiction in being a leader and having a coaching attitude"* can be interpreted as an experience of integration related to coaching leadership. Carrie further develops this declaration by describing a generic situation in which the leader provides *"information about how things will be"*. This action alludes to a one-way, linear communication situation, where the leader instructs the employees in how things are to be. The way in which *"things should be"* is not negotiable: she does not ask the employee about how he or she thinks, or feels, that *"things should be"*. As such, there are general conditions about this situation that make the coaching approach inadequate or unfavourable. The situation does not immediately seem to involve a large degree of coachability because the leader's duty is simply to share and convey instructions.

However, Carrie finds elements of coachability in this situation through the possibility of taking *"a coaching attitude"*, which she connects to being *"attentive to the person you are giving instructions to"*. Moreover, this attentiveness also seems to incorporate the willingness to check the employee's reactions and emotions in relation to the situation by *"asking control questions"*. Carrie concludes by stating that this example illustrates how one can make *"the most out of coaching leadership"*, which is about looking for the coachability of situations by going into them with a coaching attitude.

When in the interview Andrew he is asked to explore the boundary of coaching leadership by reflecting on situations in which he does not see himself as a coaching leader, he points out that he works in a global company with thousands of employees spread over many countries. Bearing this in mind, some general rules and conditions must apply to all sections of the company, and to all employees, across cultural and geographical boundaries:

It applies to everyone, and does not necessarily suit everyone. For instance, you need to have the same medicine for different diseases, and this is not always an easy pill to swallow. But then you realize that you are a small cog in a big machine, and you need certain ground rules, for instance. Or some things are decided, this is how we do it in X (the name of the company). It doesn't make any difference whether you coach yourself right to heaven; this is how it has to be done at any rate, if you know what I mean? So, clearly, there will be situations, but then it's probably more about being able to see that this is how it needs to be, or how can I live with that? How can I fit my everyday life to this?

Instead of concluding that the presented situation is “*non-coachable*”, even though the conditions presented do not, at first glance, seem to invite Andrew to take a coaching approach, he goes on to search for the coachability of the situation. From the coachability perspective, it seems like he starts by concluding that the situation is “non-coachable” when he says: “*it doesn't make any difference whether you coach yourself right to heaven*”. In a sense, Andrew “closes the door” on a coaching approach because coaching would not at any rate change anything about the given situation. What renders the coaching approach inadequate is the fact that some things must “*apply to everyone*”, whether the employees like it or not. In these situations it seems as if the leader becomes the keeper of the company norms, rules and regulations, as expressed by such phrases as: “*you need certain ground rules*”, “*certain things are determined*” and “*this is how we do it in X (the name of the company)*”. A coaching approach would not make any difference, even if “*you coach yourself right to heaven*”, which might imply coaching in a qualitatively good way. No matter how good a coach the leader is, it does not help him in a situation like this because no matter what approach the leader takes, it does not change anything about the situation itself because “*this is how it is to be done at any rate*”. In the last part of this excerpt Andrew seems to conclude that the coachability of the situation is non-existent: “*so, clearly, there will be situations*”. Here Andrew is probably referring to the question where he was asked to reflect on situations where he did not see himself as a coaching leader.

However, a tension or dilemma exists in relation to the situation because the rules and regulations, which “*apply to everyone*”, are “*not always an easy pill to swallow*”, and do “*not suit everyone*”. It seems that this dilemma is the reason why the coachability of the situation is explored, even though Andrew just concluded that a coaching approach was inadequate by saying: “*it doesn't make any difference*

whether you coach yourself right to heaven". However, while reflecting, it seems as if Andrew "flips the coin", turns the situation around and starts looking for the coachability of the given situation. It seems like the experienced coachability of the situation increases when he acknowledges that "*it is probably more about being able to see that this is how it needs to be*". While he has just concluded that even the best leader coach who has the ability to coach herself "*right to heaven*" cannot coach in this situation, he discovers that a coaching approach might indeed be a plausible approach to the situation in question.

He reflects on the possibility that coaching could actually be about helping the employee see the larger picture and thus realise that "*this is how it needs to be*". Using a coaching approach, he can, so to speak, lead the horse to water, as the saying goes *and* make it drink as he can lead the employee to a renewed and more holistic understanding of the situation. As he says earlier in the excerpt: "*(...) then you realise you are a small cog in a big machine*". The coachability of this situation seems to be about helping the employee explore ways in which she can better adjust to given, non-negotiable conditions. By taking a coaching approach, he can help the employee to ask herself such questions as: "*how can I live with that?*" and "*how can I fit my everyday life to this?*" This entire excerpt seems to be an expression of the willingness to search for the coachability of situations within leadership, which, in turn, seems to reflect an integrative experience of coaching leadership.

In much the same way as Andrew, James flips the coin whilst reflecting on the limits of the coaching approach – but in this case, it is in relation to the culture at his workplace. Initially, James concludes that the compatibility between coaching and his work culture is low:

I believe....it's not very well suited for it (coaching). Really. I mean, you shouldn't ...I don't think you should tell people that...that now we're going to...now I'm going to coach you! Then I feel that they would think that "*holy cow! That's dangerous! That probably hurts!*" (both chuckle a little) *That sounds painful!*"

Here James expresses an experienced discrepancy between what he understands as coaching and the way in which he perceives the culture at his workplace: "*it's not very well suited for it (coaching). Really*". However, after having described the work culture more in-depth, and after having, again, concluded that the compatibility is low, he turns completely around and looks at the situation from the opposite angle:

So it's probably not such a....it's probably not very well suited, I'm thinking, like, at the outset. But on the other hand, maybe you could say that this is exactly where it is well suited, I don't know? Because *there*, there's.....there's much underneath the surface which is not..... if you use the right tricks and get people to start saying something, then you see there is much under the surface. Which hasn't been visible before.

Here James starts out by concluding: "*it's probably not very well suited*". James is judging the coachability, the coaching opportunity, in his work culture, as insignificant. However, by adding the words: "...*I'm thinking, like, at the outset*", he is reserving judgement, which opens for the discovery that it could just as easily be perceived in a different way. This reservation is further elaborated on when in the next phrase he says: "*but on the other hand*". He reflects about whether it is exactly in such a culture that coaching "*is well suited*". In describing his workplace, he uses the term "black and white", and explains: "*It's like - if things are good, you hear nothing. You just hear nothing until it explodes, right?*" The reason why coaching might, nevertheless, be "*well suited*", seems to be because it might simply be a way of getting people to talk so they will be able to resolve issues before they "explode". Furthermore, he adds that: "*If I ask questions about, for instance, like, how they feel about the working environment in the workplace here, and things like that - it's all quiet*". It seems, from the above excerpt, that the coachability of such a work culture might be about finding a way of using "*the right tricks and get[ting] people to start saying something*". "*The right tricks*" might allude to coaching tools and techniques, and he reflects on the possibility of using such "*tricks*" to achieve things to make visible the things that are "*under the surface*". Then, things that have not "*been visible before*" come to the surface. This can be interpreted as an expression of coachability: James reflects on the conditions on which he might take a coaching approach, even in a culture which does not initially, to him, seem to allow for or invite coaching.

The coachability subcategory has now been presented. Below the third and last subcategory of the integration category, junction, will be presented.

5.2.3. Junction

This subcategory reflects a salient aspect of the data, which is about an experience of junction, of finding an orientation, a way of combining coaching and leadership. This is connected to the experience of finding a self-concept, identity, a narrative, in other words, some kind of explanation for whom one is, or becomes, while integrating coaching as a part of one's leadership. For some, the junction is obvious from the moment they learn about coaching, as it has been shown in the confirmation category above: Coaching and leadership "fit like a glove". There is resonance and coherence between what they learn about coaching from the beginning because in a sense they have always felt as though they have been coaching leaders. For others, this is a process that is more ambiguous and takes time, but eventually the pieces fall into place and the experience of junction emerges. For yet other leaders, the experience of junction is about finding a co-existence of different roles within leadership. In the following, different aspects of the experience of junction will be presented.

At the time of the interview Ida was working both as a professional coach and as a leader. She expresses that being a coaching leader feels different from being a professional coach: *"I'm sitting here and feeling that there's a great difference"*. She explains the difference as being about when she is coaching paying clients: *"I'm much more aware of using my toolbox"*. However, she says that this *"toolbox"* might as well be used in her leadership, although in *"bits and pieces"*:

All these interventions and tools which I use regularly, when I'm the coach of paying clients, I bring in bits and pieces into the team leader role or into my role as coaching leader.

This excerpt additionally emphasizes Ida's *"feeling"*, expressed above, that being a coach for paying clients is a significantly different experience than being what she calls a *"coaching leader"*. She expresses that she brings the *"interventions and tools"* from coaching into her leadership, not in their entire form, but rather, in *"bits and pieces"*. This might indicate that even though she calls herself a *"coaching leader"*, this does not imply that she coaches at all times or in all situations within her leadership practice. It seems that even though she sees herself as a coaching leader, coaching is juxtaposed with other approaches in given situations. However, at the same time, she expresses that the activation of coaching within her leadership happens more or less unconsciously:

Automatically, all the coaching I've learned has just flowed into my leadership. Without me thinking about it at all.

Here she is expressing an experience of junction: of feeling that coaching and leadership are joined together and combined in an integral way, in that it just "*flowed into*" her leadership. It seems that for Ida, learning about coaching inevitably entails that she becomes a "*coaching leader*". This might appear as a contradiction to the statement above, in which she expresses a more divided or split experience of coaching leadership. How does the coaching that "*just flows into*" her leadership cohere with the experience of bringing "*bits and pieces*" of coaching into her leadership, as described above? One interpretation of these contradictory statements might be that for Ida coaching automatically "*flows into*" her leadership, but not in its entire form. This could mean that coaching does not fit all situations or conversations, but when it is activated in the leadership context, it just happens automatically, possibly when she intuitively experiences that it is adequate.

Another interpretation of the discrepancy between the two excerpts above might be that unlike most of the other participants in the course, Ida attended it primarily to develop her competence as coach rather than as a leader seeking to use coaching as part of her leadership. It might seem that since her primary focus is to develop her qualities and skills as a professional coach, she is not aware of or preoccupied with how it affects her leadership to the same extent that she might have been if she her main aim was to develop her leader competence. Coaching in the leadership context is more of a bi-product of her developing coaching competence for use in the professional field than an end itself, and for this reason she only brings it into her leadership in "*bits and pieces*". If she had gone through the course with the purpose of developing her skills as a coaching leader, on the other hand, she might have activated coaching within her leadership practice to a larger degree. Such an interpretation might be confirmed by the following:

I'm thinking that whether I should call myself leader or coaching leader, you can decide that, you know! For me it's not that important. (...) When I enter a situation and say: "*we've got to do something about this*", it's important for me to say this in such a clear way that the people in my team understand that "*ok, here, there's something we've got to....we need to do something about this*". So whether I'm a leader then, or a coaching leader, or whether I might probably also be a little bit Ida in exactly such a situation....(...)...it's not that important. As long as I'm clear. (...) And then we have to go in and do something about this message which I've then given. And then I feel that I automatically become a coaching leader.

Here Ida seems open to the idea that there might be a coaching element in what she does in this specific situation, which is primarily about conveying information, as in the case described by Carrie in the coachability subcategory above. However, for Ida, it is not important to determine whether what she does should be called coaching or not: "*whether I should call myself leader or coaching leader, you can decide that, you know! For me it's not that important.*" This statement is connected to a situation in which the most important element is clarity. Her primary aim is "*to say this in such a clear way*" that her employees understand that something has to be done: "*we need to do something about this*". She remains open, however, to the possibility that even in this situation, when the emphasis is on being clear and conveying information which makes it clear that something has to be done, there might be an element of the "*coaching leader*". She is willing to define herself as "*Ida*", "*a coaching leader*" and also simply as "*the leader*".

However, in the last part of the excerpt, she expresses that the moment she starts to "*do something about this message which I've then given*" she "*automatically becomes a coaching leader*". This might be understood as an expression of a certain ambiguity related to the concept of coaching leadership: She is not sure whether she is the coaching leader while conveying normative information about things which need to be done, but she feels certain that the moment she starts working with the information she has given, "*do something about this message which I've then given*", she is the coaching leader, and this happens automatically. This last part of the excerpt might, again, relate to the situation described by Carrie in the coachability subcategory above: in a situation in which she needed to convey normative information about "*how things will be*", she found an element of coaching, in other words, she found coachability in the situation which rendered a coaching approach possible and fitting. Similarly, it seems that Ida finds coachability in the situation in

saying that “*I automatically become a coaching leader*”. Thus, for Ida, there seems to be both clarity and ambiguity as to when and whether she assumes the role of the coaching leader. However, she expresses in both excerpts that the process of applying coaching into leadership is an integrative experience in that it happens “*automatically*”, and it just “*flows into*” her leadership. Another interpretation is that the feeling of automation in the situation is connected to an intuitive understanding or sense of knowing about how the coaching approach can fit in the situation. For Ida, the experience of junction in relation to coaching leadership is characterised by an experience that coaching “*just flows into*” leadership, although in “*bits and pieces*”, which seems to imply that she does not always look upon herself as a “*coaching leader*”, but also as “*Ida*” and just “*the leader*”.

For Peter, the experience of junction related to coaching leadership started long before the coaching course. He expresses that in the course he felt confirmed as a leader in terms of having done something “*right*”, as shown in the confirmation subcategory above. For him, the experience of junction seems to be related to a sense of coherence, of feeling that coaching and leadership are elements that fit together from the outset. For him, the coaching discourse resonates with his experience and he has a feeling that the idea of coaching seems reasonable and applicable to leadership as he knows it. In the interview, he states: “*I probably am a coaching leader*”. It appears that by learning about coaching he has found a headline, a keyword or overall label for his leadership, and this makes it natural for him to call himself a coaching leader. In the interview he connects coaching to a “*leader style*”:

It (coaching leadership) doesn't imply, you know, that one shouldn't reprimand or regulate, or address uncomfortable things. You can be inclusive, open, trusting – you can do all those good things. But at the same time, you must, sort of, never forget your leader's duties. It's a leader style, but a leader duty can also be about making the uncomfortable decisions.

Here Peter suggests that being a coaching leader does not mean that one stops performing or “*forgets*” one's “*leader's duties*”. He connects coaching leadership to being inclusive, open and trusting, and holds that these qualities do not operate at the expense of other qualities that also appear to be crucial to doing a good job as a leader. In the last part of the excerpt, Peter discriminates between a “*leader style*” and a “*leader duty*”. Choosing coaching as one's leader style does not imply rejecting or

replacing specific leader duties. One interpretation of this can be that coaching is used to perform these duties in a better way. This implies that Peter sees himself as a coaching leader in the sense that he has a coaching style he applies to a variety of leadership duties. However, this gives rise to the question of whether he finds coaching applicable to all sorts of situations, and whether he would call himself a coaching leader even whilst performing the “*leader duty*” of “*making the uncomfortable decisions*”. An excerpt from another part of the interview might shed light on this issue. Peter talks about an upcoming conversation with an employee where he will need to reprimand his employee in one way or another. In this instance, he reflects on possible outcomes of this conversation, one of which could be dismissal. While asked whom he would “be” if he arrived at such a conclusion, Peter answers:

Peter: Well, then I’m the boss, sort of, then I’m not, you know, a coach, then I’m a boss!

Gunhild: A boss?

Peter: Yes!?! But then I make a boss’s decision about which I feel reasonably safe because I have already tried every other possible way out of the problem. I hope I won’t come to this stage this time either, I hope I’ll solve it in a different way.

Gunhild: So being the boss is the final way out of the problem?

Peter: Yes, I guess it is? In this context?

Gunhild: Are there any other contexts in which you are the boss, then?

Peter: No, it doesn’t feel like that, you know - well, I am! Formally! But I don’t want to, sort of, how should I put it...in the department, I want to be Peter, I want to be the facilitator, ensure that people are well, make sure that people have the proper conditions to do their job, but ultimately, I’m the boss, you know. But that’s not a burden.

Gunhild: Never?

Peter: No, I don’t think so.

Gunhild: No, and not even in the situations where you have to step in and be a boss because....

Peter: No, not a burden, but it is uncomfortable to make unpopular decisions. It might be uncomfortable at times, but necessary. But this is a part of the game, I was about to say. You know that if you choose a job like this, or a position with overriding responsibility, it’s part of the total package.

Here Peter starts out by contrasting different roles within his leadership practice: being a coach and being a boss. It seems that at the start of the excerpt he suggests the boss role is one he only assumes when every other “*way out*” has been tried, and the

role of the boss is one he reluctantly assumes: *“I hope I won’t come to this stage this time either”*. This might imply that in coaching leadership, something that he seems to fully adhere and commit to by calling himself a *“coaching leader”*, there is no room for being the boss. However, during the conversation he makes it clear that he is always the boss, in the formal sense: *“well, I am! Formally!”* This is a role from which he cannot escape at any time – a role he always has as long as he is in a leader position. However, he does not want to be regarded as the boss in the everyday contact with his employees: he rather wants to be perceived as *“Peter”*. This might express a wish to diminish the hierarchical space between the leader and the employee and be on the same level, so to speak. Peter then makes a statement about which role he wishes to nurture and promote: *“I want to be the facilitator, ensure that people are well, make sure that people have the proper conditions to do their job”*. The role of the facilitator, which is most likely connected to the coaching *“leader style”*, is the leader role he wants to have, if possible. This interpretation is also fully confirmed when in the next sentence he uses the adverb *“ultimately”* to connect the role of the boss to a situation, which he would really rather not be in. Being the boss seems like the *“final way out”*. This impression is reinforced by the adjective *“uncomfortable”* when describing what it is like to make *“unpopular decisions”*. It seems like he is most comfortable when he can be the facilitator, but at times he has no choice but to perform *“leader duties”*, which also involves making *“unpopular decisions”*.

In the last part of the excerpt, Peter expresses that *“this”* is *“part of the game”* and *“part of the total package”*. The word *“this”* might in this instance refer to making unpopular decisions and performing leader duties, or it might as well allude to the entire theme he is reflecting on: all these elements are part of the *“total package”* of being a leader. It seems that for Peter, coaching leadership involuntarily involves performing *“leader duties”*, such as making unpopular decisions, although the role he prefers to have is that of the facilitator. By stating that being a boss is no *“burden”*, he seems to have found, after all, a way of living with the dynamic between being the coaching leader, the facilitator he prefers to be and the boss that he is obliged to be due to his position, because it is *“part of the game”*.

Barbara, one of the focus-group informants, clearly discriminates between what she refers to as being a *“pure coach”* and being a coaching leader. However, at the same time, she expresses that she does not see the *“contrast”* between coaching and leadership:

In my opinion, those are two different things, you know. If you are a pure coach, it's like (...) you have a profession where someone comes and has a problem (...) someone has a challenge and you coach this person to a solution like we've learned something about in the coaching study. (...) A leader has a goal, he is going *there*, but we have learned some techniques, which do not make us coaches, but we might use these coaching techniques in our leadership practice in order to reach this goal. And therefore I don't see a contradiction in being a leader and having a coaching leader style, because you are the leader at any rate. At times, the coaching leader style works. At other times, it's "*I-want-you-will*".

Here Barbara expresses an experience of junction as she has found a way in which coaching and leadership resonate and cohere. She clearly distinguishes between a "*coaching leader style*" and what she calls "*pure*" coaching, or being a "*pure coach*". However, in spite of this discrimination, coaching and leadership are combined and joined in her leadership without this being a contrasting experience. It seems like she has found a way of naturally and obviously integrating coaching into her leadership since she does not "*see the contrast in being a leader and having a coaching leader style*". However, this does not mean that she regards herself as a "*coach*", nor does she label herself a "*coaching leader*". Learning coaching techniques does not make her a coach, but it allows her to use these techniques "*in order to reach this goal*". On the way to achieving the goals of the organisation, she might use coaching as a technique. One interpretation of this distinction might be that she does not see herself as a coach because she has attended a 10-day course. Another possible interpretation is that in the role of the leader she can never be the "*coach*" because in this situation she will be "*the leader at any rate*". She seems to experience that she is primarily, and at all times, the leader. Choosing a "*coaching leader style*" therefore does not imply becoming a coach, but rather means using coaching whenever appropriate in given situations.

Barbara expresses an action-oriented, pragmatic experience of coaching leadership by saying: "*At times, the coaching leader style works*". The utility perspective, the idea of whether coaching works or not, becomes an important factor in determining when to use coaching and when to use other approaches. In the last

sentence she expresses that “*At other times, it’s ‘I-want-you-will’*”.⁴⁰ Coaching “works” in given situations. This might mean that it is useful, helpful, appropriate or functional in some situations, whereas in others, the leader needs to make use of what might be interpreted as a more instructional approach: “*I want-you-will*”. For Barbara, coaching leadership does not imply using coaching in all situations. The experience of junction seems to be related to a leader style in which coaching techniques are used whenever appropriate to reach organisational goals.

For James, an experience of junction of his coaching and leadership emerged from a process of confusion, dissonance, disjunction and fracture. He found something in the coaching course that did not immediately resonate with his idea and experience of leadership, but rather, represented a break with or a contrast to his earlier experience. As shown in the self-confidence section above, James’ self-confidence as a leader was challenged in his encounter with the coaching discourse. In this subcategory, a similar experience of destabilisation is expressed, but rather than being directly connected to his self-confidence, the disjunction and confusion, which eventually seem to lead to an experience of junction, are more theoretically grounded. James expresses an experience of not seeing how the idea of coaching might fit into his idea of leadership. He says:

In the first assembly, I very clearly perceived that a clear prerequisite in the coaching work is that you should not influence! Not to give the coachee any advice! Or in any other way lead the coachee in his/her process towards a goal, you know, in the conversation. Do you remember? This is how I understood it, anyway, this was defined as a prerequisite for it to be called coaching, that you should not influence. But later on in the course, it was, sort of....I mean, I had misunderstood you know! Because, this, I have understood later on; you *can* do that! You can give advice, you can lead...as a coach, you can lead the coachee in a direction, right? Without breaking with the principles, you know. But this was very disturbing for me, because I thought, well, what on earth do I need this for, then? I mean, in nearly all conversations that I have in this workplace, the goal is set! Right? The goal is right there! (...) I needed some time to, sort of, put this aside, you know, before I, kind of got...how to put it,

⁴⁰ “I-want-you-will” is an expression which has been frequently used in the coaching course, and particularly in the focus group from which this excerpt comes. The expression refers to an instructional approach: giving information or commands which are non-disputable or non-negotiable.

myself established, you know! Where I stand. And, where am I... where do I start working from?

Here the experience of junction seems to be expressed as a result of a process characterised by disjunction and confusion. When James says at the end of the excerpt that he “*kind of*” got himself “*established*”, it might mean that as a result of the process he found grounds from which “*he could start working*”; the grounds on which “*he stands*”. From this point on things started to make sense to him theoretically: his understanding of the coaching theory developed during the course, and eventually, as his understanding evolved, the theoretical postulations made more and more sense and agreed more and more with how he perceived and experienced his leadership practice. The passage when James says: “*Without breaking with the principles, you know*” indicates an eagerness to make the two dimensions: the coaching “*principles*” and leadership as he knows it from his experience fit together. This could in itself be an expression of an integrative experience: elements that do not fit together at the outset create “*disturbance*” until he finds the grounds “*where he stands*”, from where he can start working in an integrative way.

James found, eventually, that he could use coaching in his leadership without “*breaking with the principles*” of coaching – where the two worlds could meet, so to speak, because he discovered that coaching theory allowed him to do what he needs to do in his leadership: influence employees on the path to a goal. As he says: “*In nearly all conversations that I have at this workplace, the goal is set! Right? The goal is right there!*” This seems to be a condition from which he cannot flee, a fact he cannot deny. A theory that does not allow him to guide employees towards the goal, which “*is right there*” and is “*set*”, is, as he expresses it in another part of the interview: “*useless*”⁴¹ for him. He therefore needed the theory to make more sense before he could “*use*” it. Such a sense-making process thus seems to be connected to a development in his understanding of the coaching theory during the course.

Moreover, the pronoun “*myself*”, and the phrase “*where I stand*” in the last part of the excerpt indicate that the experience of integration, which seems to be expressed, might as well incorporate a personal dimension. What is here interpreted as a process from disjunction, disturbance and confusion to integration is not merely

⁴¹ James uses the English word “useless” here.

about making two theoretical worlds, that of leadership and that of coaching, and then putting them together by finding common conceptual grounds. It is also about finding the grounds from where he, *as a person*, can “*start working*”. From there he can find a way of integrating coaching into his leadership, meaning the context in which he works, including all its specific conditions and contingencies. However, it also includes finding a way in which he can integrate the coaching approach into himself as a person in relation to his role as a leader.

In a later part of the interview, when asked what led him to discover these grounds, or what he describes in different parts of the interview as the “*platform*”, he answers: “*It was more like...it, seeped into place, sort of*”. In concluding about his process of finding his way, so to speak, into coaching leadership, James applies the verb “*seep*”. This verb might allude to a slow, continuous movement where a slippery substance seeps in until it fits in and thus falls “*into place*”. The experience of junction in relation to coaching leadership is thus understood in James’s case as a process of gradually experiencing more and more coherence and resonance between his experience of leadership and coaching.

Another informant in one of the focus groups, Neil, expresses a different aspect of the experience of junction in the following excerpt:

Neil: If I want something, I’ll point. If I feel that it doesn’t matter how something is done but it’s important that they (the employees) have a sense of ownership over it, then I’ll facilitate.

Gunhild: Yes, and the first thing you said, who are you then?

Neil: Then I’m a boss and a leader.

Gunhild: Boss and leader, and the other thing you said?

Neil: Then I’m in a supportive function. I’m organizing for others to develop. (...) It could be that I have invited people to, if they want to have a conversation about teaching, we might have that and then I don’t have a common solution but I want to help people move on.

Gunhild: Then you can be coaching?

Neil: Then I can be a coach. But then I clearly open for there being no power in it, you know, because then I’m not saying then that there is any answer key either.

At first glance, this excerpt seems to convey an experience of *disjunction* rather than junction in that Neil expresses some kind of division, a certain split, between two different modes within his leadership. For him, being a “*coach*” can only be actualized on certain conditions. In order for the coaching role to be rendered possible, or adequate, he cannot as a leader be involved in the process in question in

terms of knowing which direction he wants it to take because the moment he “wants something”, he must “point”. The verb “point” might allude to leading a process in a specific direction. In these situations he does not see himself as a coach, but rather as the “boss and the leader”.

On the other hand, there are also situations within his leadership practice in which he can be a “coach”. For instance, in situations where he needs an employee to feel a certain “responsibility” for a process, or where “it doesn’t matter how it happens”, he can be the facilitator. This function might, in this instance, be interpreted as being in the role of the “coach”. Similarly, when Neil talks about a “supportive function” in which he is “organising for others to develop”, this alludes to taking the role of the “coach”. His motivation in such situations is that he “wants to help people move on”, a motivation which allows for a coaching role. This is rendered possible because there is no “common solution”. The term common solution might allude to a solution that the leader and the employee have found together through a negotiated process in which both have interests and are involved. On the other hand, it could refer to a ready-made or already existing solution in terms of, for instance, a common rule, norm or regulation that applies to everyone in the company. The “common solution” seems to be an aspect of the situation which makes the coaching role inadequate and which calls for a more “pointing” intervention – which might be interpreted as a more directive and instructive approach – in which he regards himself more as a “boss and a leader” than a “coach”.

Furthermore, the “answer key” Neil refers to in the last sentence of this excerpt could be interpreted as a variation of the term “common solution” in the second interpretation suggested above: a decision that is already made and non-negotiable. The “answer key” and the “common solution” might, in this understanding, represent a certain normativity in the situation which is promoted by the leader in the encounter with the employee, based on what he thinks is the best solution. Alternatively, the “answer key” could refer to norms, rules or regulations that he conveys to the employee on behalf of, for instance, a board or his leader. Another possibility is that it alludes to a majority decision. In the last part of the excerpt Neil relates the lack of an “answer key” to equality: a power-free space, so to speak: “I clearly open for there being no power play in it, you know”. The power dimension in the relation between the leader and the employee might be annulled or suspended in situations where there is no answer key, no already decided direction or

fixed answer. It seems like, for Neil, a prerequisite for the experience of junction of coaching and leadership is the experience of being clear about the situations in which he can use coaching as an approach and those situations where this will be inadequate.

The above excerpt indicates that Neil is more preoccupied with determining the boundaries of coaching within the leadership context than what is expressed in the other accounts presented in this subcategory. For him, the decision to assume the coaching role is situational: in some situations, in given conditions, he would refrain from calling himself a “coach”. Such a stance might, however, also be seen in the account of Peter above: in some situations he is the “boss” rather than the coach, although for him the role of the boss is something he only assumes when every other solution has been exhausted, because the role he wishes to have is that of the “facilitator” or just “Peter”. For Neil, the role of the coach seems more limited within his leadership practice than for Peter. However, when Neil enters the role of the coach, he is completely and fully the “coach”. Barbara, on the other hand, would not, under any circumstances, call herself a “coach”. She would rather talk about having a “*coaching leader style*”, or using the “*techniques*” she has learned in the coaching course. Bearing this in mind, Neil’s experience of junction in relation to coaching leadership seems to be about clearly distinguishing between the different roles he can assume according to various situations within his leadership practice.

It could be argued that Neil does not express an experience of junction at all when it comes to combining coaching with leadership. On the contrary, it might seem like coaching and leadership cannot be combined: in order to be the “*coach*”, Neil is obliged to resign from his leader role, so he speaks, which he labels “*the boss and the leader*”, and step into the role of the “*coach*”. The other excerpts in this section promote, in a sense, a more inclusive understanding of coaching and leadership than the above excerpt involving Neil. For instance, Barbara and James are clear about the idea that reaching the goal is their primary aim as leaders, a purpose that cannot be denied or suspended at any time. They convey an experience of being primarily the leader who might use coaching as an approach “*whenever appropriate*”, as expressed by Barbara. When Peter talks about a “*coaching leader style*” and calls himself a “*coaching leader*”, and Ida says that coaching has just “*flowed into*” her leadership, and also calls herself a “*coaching leader*”, it seems that they in some way or another regard coaching as a “*headline*” – an overall orientation of their leadership, although

neither Peter nor Ida express that coaching has become the solution to all leadership situations.

Neil does not take one or the other perspective as the overriding “*headline*”, he does not prefer the one role over the other, but points out that he can shift between the two in relation to what the situation presents and calls for. As such, it might be argued that like the other leaders, Neil has found a way in which he can identify with coaching leadership and where he sees the opportunity for the different modes to co-exist. He suggests that the role of the “*boss and the leader*” is incompatible with the “coach” role as they cannot operate at the same time. However, it might still be argued that there is an element of junction here as Neil has found a way of integrating and joining coaching and leadership. A completely different case in this category would have been a leader who expressed that in his experience there was no room for coaching within his leadership practice.

The experience of junction has hereby been presented as a subcategory of the integration category.

5.2.4. Summary of the integration category

The leaders in this study express an experience of integration as a key part of the experience of coaching leadership. Even though coaching does not pervade the leadership practice and does not become everything the leader does in all situations, it is an integral part of what the leaders do and how they understand their leadership practice, although expressed in different ways. For this reason, some of the leaders call themselves coaching leaders, whereas others seem to express the idea of coaching more as a technique or approach which they use in appropriate situations. The common factor is, however, that for the leaders this is not a contradicting experience: coaching and leadership fit together in a natural and integral way. One aspect of the integration category is that the leaders seem to feel a certain degree of personal change as a consequence of learning about and using coaching, thus they bring their “new selves” into all sorts of situations and contexts that make coaching an integrative experience in relation to who they are as persons and thus also who they are as leaders. The experience of coachability is, likewise, a part of the integrative experience of being a coaching leader. The opportunity to take a coaching approach is found in a variety of situations within the leadership practice. The experience of

junction is found to be an integral experience in that coaching and leadership are, in different ways, joined and combined.

In the following, the third and final category, connectedness, will be presented.

5.3. Connectedness

An important aspect of the experience of coaching leadership, as expressed by the leaders in this study, is the experience of connectedness in relation to the employees. Connectedness is in this instance understood as an experience of meeting the other person, not merely in terms of a physical meeting, but connecting at a deeper level. This means taking the other person into consideration and seeing him or her as someone with unique experiences and personal qualities. One conspicuous dimension of the experience of coaching leadership is about taking the employee into consideration, which for some means to a larger degree than before. When the leaders in this study start to use coaching within their leadership, a new kind of connectedness emerges in their relation to their employees. This experience has various aspects that will be elaborated on and explained below by means of the subcategories care, influence and enrichment.

5.3.1. Care

In this category the experience of connectedness is related to an experience of care. Care is in this instance understood as an experience of discovering the other person's humanity and vulnerability, and thus wishing to be of help. It involves elements of sympathy, empathy, concern, consideration and compassion for the other person, and it implies discovering the *person* behind the employee. In some cases, this experience results from conversations that take place when the leader initially called the employee on the carpet to reprimand him or her for undesirable behaviour. However, because the coaching approach is used, the employee shares information so the leader realises that personal challenges may be causing the undesirable behaviour. The same process unfolds in conversations that are not necessarily occasioned by the need to reprimand employees. In either case, this situation seems to entail an experience of care, which is a wish to help by listening and showing understanding and empathy in the conversation, but also by using one's leader authority to solve the problem. The experience of care thus incorporates a *being* dimension: an experience of community

and fellowship, of connecting as equal human beings in the conversation, and of showing respect, love and care. However, it also involves a *doing* dimension: the leader uses his or her position to arrange the working conditions in such a way that the employee can proceed in a positive direction.

Peter talks about an employee who asked to have a conversation in relation to a specific task he did not want to perform that involved participating in unfamiliar social contexts:

Through various techniques that I thought I had become aware of using as a coach and through the course, I made him tell me why he had changed totally in a short time (...). Then it turned out that there were other more profound reasons why he didn't want to do it. And this was about low self-esteem, among others. (...) This is a boy with plenty of resources. Professionally strong and personally energetic, the way I see him. The reason for this, again, was the breakup of his relationship, which was probably more difficult to handle than he was willing to accept at the outset. And this came to light as a consequence of this conversation, you know (...). I remember asking him lots of questions, saying, sort of: "*Well, why would a breakup change your personality, like, don't you trust yourself? Are there things, for example, giving you a bad conscience in relation to your former spouse, related to the kids, related to your duties as a father?*" Like, all those things.

Here Peter starts by relating the conversation in the example to coaching leadership when he states that he was aware in the situation of using techniques that he had learned in the coaching course: "*Through various techniques, which I thought I had been aware of using as a coach and through the course, I made him tell me why he had changed totally in a short time*". The employee opened up and shared the more profound reason why he did not want to perform the task in question, seemingly as a consequence of the coaching approach that Peter chose to take in the conversation. An expression of care may be found in the way in which Peter relates to the sharing of personal challenges from the employee. He conveys a high opinion of this employee, whom he perceives as "*a boy with plenty of resources. Professionally strong and personally energetic*". A certain shift in the situation occurs when the employee shows vulnerability by sharing personal information. This information seems to entail an experience of care and concern on the part of Peter, and a wish to help and support the employee.

Peter's use of the word "*boy*" gives associations to parental care. Even though this is a conversation between two adults, a certain imbalance might be interpreted

from this word, together with the fact that this is a conversation between a leader and his employee. Peter senses that the employee is struggling with a feeling of low self-esteem as a result of the on-going divorce. He expresses an urge to restore the employee's self-esteem by challenging his view of himself: "*why would a breakup change your personality, like, don't you trust yourself?*" He tries to lift his employee to the position where he thinks he should be: at a place where he can be in touch with a feeling of self-esteem. This might be read as an expression of care: he cares so much for his employee that he does not want him to feel bad about himself.

In one of the focus-group interviews, one of the leaders, Frank, comments on a theme that has been raised earlier in the conversation that he refers to as "*the idea of not being biased*". He shares a story about an employee who had phoned several times early in the morning to announce that she could not come to work. This had become a considerable problem for Frank, who, in these situations needed to find a substitute on short notice since the nature of the work requires strictly regulated time schedules. The employee was called in on the carpet. Frank states that he decided, together with other persons involved⁴² to ask questions, such as: "*What can we do for you?*" "*Is there anything about your job that causes this absence?*" Eventually, the employee shared information about health issues related to circadian rhythm that rendered her incapable of working at the hours in question. Frank says that due to this conversation his image of the employee changed dramatically, from having the perception of a "*shirker who couldn't be bothered getting up in the morning*" to now seeing the employee as a responsible person who did not consider herself capable of working in a proper way, and therefore called her boss to cancel her shift.

As a result of the conversation, changes were made so the work schedule was more adaptable to the needs of the employee in relation to her health challenges. After this event, the employee had not had a single day of absence. The question "*what can we do for you?*" might itself be an expression of the experience of care, and as such, one interpretation could have been that the leader felt care for the employee, and therefore asked the question to communicate this feeling of care. On the other hand, a genuine experience of care might as well have emerged from the response that the employee gave to these questions. When Frank realised that a health challenge was the origin of the problem, rather than indolence or irresponsibility, one might say that

⁴² This could be a co-leader or perhaps Frank's boss.

an experience of care arose. Such an experience on the part of Frank might have led to his eagerness to be of help by finding practical solutions in the work context. This latter interpretation seems more fitting since Frank talks about initially having had the idea of “*shirker who couldn't be bothered getting up in the morning*” who was causing problems for him and therefore had to be reprimanded. An experience of care might have emerged from a feeling of human connectedness, of recognising a basic human experience in the other person, and thus recognising something of oneself in the other. When Frank realised that it was not the employee's intention to cause problems for him as a leader, the possibility arose to see the employee in new ways.

Another example of the experience of care can be found in the story used to illuminate the above-mentioned experience of commitment where in one of the focus-group interviews Morris talks about an employee who creates problems for him in his department and must be reprimanded. He describes the employee as follows:

(...) a person who, sort of, has not been a part of...how to put it, part of the team, you know, been a little reserved. Is withdrawn, introverted, is not good at communicating with the others. Forgets stuff. And again, you know, this has had consequences in relation to customer complaints.

The employee is called in on the carpet and Morris chooses to challenge the advice from his boss, and also to challenge his former way of thinking and working by taking a coaching approach to the situation. He decides to ask questions to try to find the reason behind the undesirable behaviour. As he expresses it: “*who is this person? What makes him stay on the periphery and not want to contribute in the circle?*” In the excerpt below, Morris explains what happened when he asked his questions:

Eventually, it came to light that he had some challenges, you know. And he hadn't spoken to anyone about them. And when I asked him “*why aren't you?*”, his response was, you know, that he had learned back home that “*you don't do that*”. You see? Background. Which influenced him a great deal in relation to behaviour. And this was very interesting. And I tried to follow up. Pat on the shoulder. Attention. “*Are you ok?*” “*How are you today?*” Yes. Small things like that. And he has totally changed his style. And even given feedback that this has been.....he was grateful for this. Very happy that we took this initiative with him.

In this excerpt it seems like an experience of care and compassion is being expressed. For instance, a “*pat on the shoulder*” is associated with a feeling of concern for the

other person, of wanting to show that he cares for him. Questions like “*are you ok?*” and “*how are you today?*” can reflect a genuine feeling of care for the employee, and a wish to convey this feeling to him. As shown in the commitment subcategory above, instead of “*decapitating*” the employee, in a figurative sense, meaning instructing the employee to change his “*style*”, Morris chose a coaching approach, manifested by asking questions that were most likely the result of curiosity about and interest in the reason behind the undesirable behaviour. As with Frank’s story above, the questioning, which might be associated with a coaching approach led to a change in the way in which Morris regarded the employee. Through the conversation, the employee appeared as a man with challenges and in the need of help, rather than an employee who needed to be reprimanded.

After Morris had told this story, the following conversation took place in the focus-group session:

Morris: So this is really interesting.

Gunhild: What should we call this tool, then?

Morris: Well....it is a coaching leadership style, really.....

Albert: Well, I call it caring, really.

Morris: Yeah, but maybe a coaching leadership style has something to do with that then.

Here one of the other leaders, Albert, explicitly introduces the concept of “*care*” as a response to the question about what this “*tool*” should be called. He seems to have found a word that characterises the entire story told by Morris; the concept of “*caring*”. Alternatively, the excerpt also indicates that for Albert this story becomes an illustration of the caring dimension of coaching leadership; coaching leadership is about caring. Morris agrees with such a perspective when he says: “*Yeah, but maybe a coaching leadership style has something to do with that then*”.

In these examples, an experience of care, concern and compassion for the employee emerges as a consequence of the leader taking a coaching approach. By asking questions, the leaders experience that employees open up and reveal information that makes them vulnerable, which again entails a different understanding on the part of the leader. This changed view or attitude leads them to want to help and find solutions. This then is the care subcategory. In the following, the subcategory of influence will be presented.

5.3.2. Influence

Whereas in the care subcategory the leader discovers new sides of the employee which makes her redefine the situation and choose different strategies for further proceedings, this subcategory reflects a different aspect of connectedness. A decision is made, and the leader needs to “sell” a message to one or several of her employees. However, instead of instructing the employee, the leader attempts to create a space in which understanding and discovery can occur on the part of the employee in such a way that the message or information in question might be internalised in the employee. As a result, the employee feels satisfied with the solution. The experience is about being able to help the employee see what she sees or discover what she has already discovered in such a way that the two arrive at a common understanding from which a solution might be found that the employee commits to. Such a shared understanding, a cooperative process in relation to the task or situation ahead, emerges rather than the leader imposing her already decided solution on the employee. The experience of influence is about finding resonance in the employee, even if the solution has already been determined and set. In this sense it relates to connectedness: The leader manages through coaching to lead the employee to a renewed understanding of the situation, which then becomes a shared understanding, a common space in which the two meet and from where they can start cooperating.

Ralph talks about a situation in which he remembers having succeeded in influencing an employee to accept a change of duties in the organisation. This primarily involved the employee having to work different hours. The employee was not at all happy about the new suggestion at the outset. In this situation Ralph was together with another leader in the organisation. He states that the employee was doing a poor job, and says: “*we didn’t trust her anymore*”, but knowing from experience that she could do a better job during the day shift they decided to move her to a different shift. The employee had just become a grandmother and her daughter and baby were living with her. Ralph suspected that she was dissatisfied with the new solution because by working at night and in the early morning hours she was able to avoid the baby crying, and she would also lose the extra money from the night shift bonus. However, during the conversation Ralph managed to get the employee to change her perspective on this by asking some questions:

Ralph: All of a sudden it hit me in the conversation: Yes! We'll ask her about this! (...) And I asked her three questions, and then, suddenly, she was all "on": Yes, but this sounded good, you know! And I had never, sort of, expected this as an answer, I thought: "*what's going on?*" (...) I don't remember everything I asked her and stuff word for word, you know, but she got the day shift, and time off on Saturdays and Sundays and...yes. She wasn't after any of these things, but she thought it was very good. (...) "*Because now you have become a grandmother*", sort of, you know, maybe used such words and stuff and that maybe it would be very good for your family, you know. All of a sudden she was all compliant while before she had been anti, anti and claws out for a long time.

Gunhild: So just like that! (snapping fingers), kind of? Because you gave her a different perspective?

Ralph: Yes, I think I shed light on the issue in a different way than the way she was thinking. (...) after this, she was all happy for as long as she worked for us.

This excerpt illustrates an experience of influence in that Ralph managed to generate a change within the employee by saying something that made her see the situation from a different angle. This resulted in the employee accepting the suggested change, even though she was "*anti, anti*" at the outset and had had her "*claws out*" for a long time. The change happened so quickly that it was almost too good to be true: Ralph was perplexed by the change in the attitude of the employee: "*I had never, sort of, expected this as an answer, I thought: what's going on?*" He does not remember the exact questions he asked, only that they involved a confirmation of the private situation the employee was in: "*Because now you have become a grandmother, sort of, you know, maybe used words and stuff like that and that maybe it would be very good for your family, you know*". It seems like the acknowledgement of her private situation, from her boss, was catalytic for the change in perceptions on her work situation. It could be that such an appreciation was exactly what she needed to become more "cooperative" in this situation.

However, the idea expressed by Ralph, the suspicion that the employee kept to the night shift so she could have a break from her family situation and to earn more money makes this supposition seem unlikely in light of the sudden change of the employee's perspective. Why would she turn "180 degrees" in this situation if what she was after was time off from her family and the night shift bonus? This leads one to think that there were other reasons why the employee did not want to change schedules. Could it be that she did not feel confirmed and acknowledged in her situation, or as a person, but when her boss asked her questions, she felt he was

acknowledging and seeing her in a new way? Whatever the case, the example illustrates an experience of being able to turn a difficult situation around by facilitating a different perspective in the employee. In the interview, Ralph proceeds by describing in more general terms his idea of influencing employees to change attitudes and beliefs when it comes to specific cases:

I think that if you are to achieve a change, a change of attitude, something like that, then people must see the benefit themselves in doing it, I really believe that. That there must be, sort of, capabilities and the will to reflect for them to change it permanently, right? For people to discover: "*ah...I want to do this because I can see it's good!*" And it doesn't have to be about dollars and cents either, it could be about them thinking: "*ha....this is good for me!*" (...) If you, sort of, try carefully then to...well, either use one or another metaphor or a story or something else to try to touch on.... approach such a...theme or whatever it might be, right? Or you could ask directly and stuff. In a way, I don't think I'll convince anyone, they have to convince themselves.

Here Ralph further elaborates on the idea expressed in the narrative presented above. He believes that to create sustainable change in attitudes and beliefs, employees must be encouraged to reflect on their relation to the issue in question. The employee must display the "*capability*" of such reflection if permanent change is to occur. What he means by capability in this instance is not expressed, however, it could imply that it is not possible to have this type of conversation with all employees unless they show such reflective capabilities. Furthermore, he expresses that the "*will*" to reflect must be present in the employee for such a change to occur. Looking back at the above case, the "*will*" Ralph refers to here might be exactly what was motivated in the employee he is talking about when he asked her questions. Bearing this in mind, the leader might facilitate the will to reflect through his communicative approach: the will can be stimulated.

However, Ralph repeats several times that the employee must arrive at a personal relation to the issue in question and determine the ways in which the solution or procedure suggested might be "*good for me*". She must "*want to do this*" because she "*can see it's good*". He suggests that a consideration of "*dollars and cents*" that could imply financial benefits, such as increased salary or bonuses, does not necessarily have to be the employee's motivation to achieve a common understanding of the situation. On the contrary, achieving such a shared, mutual understanding of the

issue in question involves the employee exploring her relation to the issue and discovering “what’s in it for her”, more than just financial benefits. Furthermore, Ralph suggests that influencing and inspiring change is not about convincing people: “*they have to convince themselves*”. The experience of influence is thus different from persuasion: it involves working with the other person in such a way that the achieved result and the common understanding of the situation are something which come from within rather than being imposed from outside.

Terry expresses a similar idea in the interview, suggesting that a coaching approach can contribute to creating a different attitude in employees:

Often, you might say that, “*well, you’ve got to do it this or that way*”. But often, it doesn’t work, right? Because they don’t do it anyway! They say “*yes, of course I’ll do it. No problem!*” Then they go back and nothing happens. Then things go on in the same track. But if you are to get people onto a different track, you know; think differently, work differently, see things from different sides, you need to use different tools. This is how I see it so far.

Earlier I probably would have just... “*yeah, do this and that*”. Right? But now I often address it in a completely different way. Always with some open questions as the point of departure. And in most cases, they walk out the door thinking: “*Yes, good! Or, like: this will be fine!*” Right? Without me having given the slightest advice along the way. And this is coaching, I believe.

In these two quotations Terry presents two fundamentally different approaches to getting people do what he wants them to do. He identifies both these approaches in his own leadership, even if he speaks in generalised terms using the personal pronoun “you” rather than “I”. When he says: “*Often, you might say (...)*”, “*often, it doesn’t work*”, this alludes to his own experience of having used such an approach with his employees. In such situations he realises that even if the employees seem to agree, “*They say yes, of course I’ll do it. No problem*”, this agreement is not grounded, but rather turns out to be an “empty shell” without substance: “*they don’t do it anyway*”. He has discovered through this experience that influencing people through commands and instructions, such as “*you’ve got to do it this or that way*”, is a less successful approach than “*using different tools*” as he puts it. He proposes that to create sustainable change in terms of influencing people to “*think differently, work differently, see things from different sides*”, a coaching approach is more adequate

than the command-and-control approach. He concludes by confirming that the strategy he promotes is rooted in his own experience: *“This is how I see it so far”*.

Furthermore, Terry addresses a development in his understanding of such situations, and his way of handling them, by saying: *“Earlier I probably would have just...”yeah, do this and that”. Right?”*, and then suggesting: *“now I often address it in a completely different way”*. Terry identifies this as a significant change, by using the word *“completely different”*. He feels that he is now more capable of influencing his employees to commit to the solution: now, he can more often, actually *“in most cases”* make them *“walk out the door”* thinking *“Yes, good! Or, like: this will be fine!”* By starting conversations with *“open questions”* he now experiences more often that the employees are satisfied with the conclusion or solution that they settle on in the conversation. In other words, to a larger degree than before, they reach a shared solution, a solution which both the leader and the employee experience as *“good”* and which they can both commit to. This happens without Terry *“giving the slightest advice along the way”*, and this makes him connect the experience to coaching: *“this is coaching, I believe”*. He believes that coaching is about an experience of influencing employees to realise the need to change without him giving advice or instructions.

Henry is crystal clear about the fact that he wants his employees to change. He needs them to change their ways of doing things in the organisation, and for this he uses coaching:

They don't know that they are being coached, you know, or that I'm using these methods, but what's important to me is for them to experience it as something exclusively positive.For them to walk away with....after a conversation with me they should be, in a way, brimming with new energy so they want to do the things they are doing even better, or see the need to change, for example, or....that's, sort of, my goal with such a conversation, you know. (...) I actually know how I want them to be. This is not, kind of, common style coaching, but this is more like I influence and use it as a method, you know. That I rather lead them to where I want them to be, without them necessarily realising that much, themselves.

Here Henry expresses an experience of influencing his employees to arrive at a different understanding of specific situations. This does not imply that he invites them into a coaching conversation labelled *“coaching”*: *“They don't know that they are being coached, you know, or that I'm using these methods”*. Coaching happens

without the employees knowing so he can influence them to change something about their behaviour or understanding. However, he underscores that he wants this experience of being coached to be an “*exclusively positive*” one where the employees are “*brimming with new energy so they want to do the things they are doing even better, or see the need to change*”. Henry points out the importance of the employee’s own discovery process, the experience that she can see, for herself, the “*need to change*”. He wants to have conversations in which the employee’s perspectives change, thus resulting in a new understanding of given situations. To create the change he is after, from his leader position, he needs the employee to see what he sees, so to speak: “*I rather lead them to where I want them to be*”. Thus Henry expresses an experience of influencing his employees by creating something new within the employee rather than imposing directives from outside.

The influence subcategory has been analysed and presented above. In the following, the third and final subcategory in the connectedness category, enrichment, will be outlined.

5.3.3. Enrichment

This category reflects an experience of connectedness that is related to an experience of feeling enriched by the employee. By listening, asking questions and considering what the other person is saying, an experience of contact and cooperation emerges. As opposed to the influence subcategory presented above, the experience of enrichment does not necessarily occur in situations where the goal is set or one wants to influence the other person in a specific direction or towards a particular goal. One element of this experience is related to discovering the resources of the employee by taking a coaching approach. Initially, the intention might not be to get more out of the employees or to optimise the human resources of the organisation, but by asking questions this has been one of the experienced consequences. By deciding to take a coaching approach, for example by asking more questions, leaders assume a different role in the conversation. This entails that the other person comes more to the forefront, presenting herself through her ideas and reflections. By asking more questions rather than providing solutions, the leaders discover that they are not alone, they are in the organisation together with their employees, who then start to represent a resource for them. The experience of enrichment is about sharing the same conditions, playing on the same team and working towards the same goal.

In the interview with Andrew, as outlined in the personal change subcategory above, he sees himself as a person who easily rushes to conclusions and looks for answers. However, after having learned about coaching, he has started to ask more questions and to hold back the impulse to provide answers, even when he believes he has the best solution. This approach has proved useful in his leadership practice in the sense that it has helped him discover that there is more potential in the organisation than what is available when taking the opposite approach:

Often, I can fall into the temptation to just go: *“Yeah, then you call him, and you do that, and then you offer this and then you can rather think about that”*. Very often I would have done that, whereas now it’s more....I can see that this is the solution, but still not say it. Still maybe ask, you know....- and I might not see the solution myself either, and then I can rather try to dig a little bit with the other person to find it...(…)...Just to, sort of, together with the other person, walk through the process. This creates energy in terms of finding a solution. Anchoring what is then, possibly what is to be said and done as opposed to just, sort of: *“do this and that”*, or *“this is the best solution”*.

These are the best conversations I have, where you get a, kind of, proper process around it. You get to talk through and you get...you feel that the other person finds answers which were not there at the outset, and that is outlandish, you know, no doubt about it.

It gets quite democratic, you might say, with an approach like that. If you’re not all the time the oracle who hands down instructions and commands and gives the answers to everything and anything, but you get a very good dynamic going with the people you are working with in terms of finding the solutions to things. Instead of one person working with it, more people share and use themselves.

These excerpts can be understood as expressions of feeling enriched by the contribution of others in work processes. Andrew starts by showing that coaching has changed his ideas about his role in conversations with employees. He has now found a more adequate way of acting in conversations than providing answers and telling employees what to do. This latter approach is exemplified by the sentence: *“Yeah, then you call him, and you do that, and then you offer this and then you can rather think about that”*.

By using the words *“fall into the temptation”*, it seems like these are ways of acting in a conversation that appear tempting to Andrew, however, not in the sense that this is what he wants to do, but rather, because this is his habitual response

pattern in his conversations at work. As mentioned above, he sees himself as a person who quickly looks for answers and conclusions, but he has now discovered possibilities that have emerged from taking a different approach: holding back the impulse to rush to conclusions. This approach evokes the “energy” which is created “in terms of finding a solution” when he “walks the process together with the other person”. The word “energy” could point at the solution itself; finding a solution creates energy, whether it is found by one person or by several people together. In this perspective, Andrew realises that when he withholds possible solutions, the other person becomes a more active and creative agent in the process and it is this other person who comes up with the solution because Andrew has assumed a more withdrawn role in the conversation. The employee does the job that Andrew would have had to do himself before: suggesting the solution. However, it seems that the “energy” is also connected to the process of “walking together”. Doing something together, cooperating, being on the same team, walking through the same process towards the same goal, all this seems to create an energizing experience. The energy created in the space between the two persons, the leader and the employee, has a value of its own.

The following excerpt from Adam has been used to illustrate the experience of mastery earlier in this chapter. However, it might also express an experience of enrichment:

I didn't have the necessary knowledge about what is right and wrong here, so I had to get it from the person in question. And then it became obvious that, yes! The answer is inside you. So I couldn't do anything else than....I experienced that my role here was to really look at this from the different angles. Get down to what was most important, what was less important? And this person could put this into words, you know, because for him this was known, you see. But through the conversation, we worked through these problems, which made it clear that the answer was obvious, and it was in the employee and less within me. Then, closing the case was very easy.

This excerpt might be an expression of the experience of enrichment: Adam feels enriched by the resources of the employee, and these stand out in the conversation because he has assumed a coaching approach. As in this situation Adam does not “have the necessary knowledge about what is right and wrong”, he needs to find a way of taking advantage of the resources in the organisation. In this case, it turns out

during the conversation that the resources needed to make a decision are found within his interlocutor, the employee, and these are realised when he assumes the coaching role by asking questions. When Adam says: “*then it became obvious that, yes! The answer is within you*”, the use of the word “*yes*”!⁴³ might express a feeling of relief related to having found what he was hoping to find, namely, the resources needed to solve the problem. The same interpretation can be made from the last sentence when he says: “*closing the case was very easy*”. He has discovered from this conversation that assuming the role of the facilitator makes it “*easy*” to arrive at a solution because the resources needed to solve the issue are already there, within the other person, and these might be realised in the conversation. In this sense, this is regarded as an expression of enrichment: Adam feels enriched by the other person and his resources, which are discovered in the conversation because he has assumed a coaching approach.

Easton talks about an upcoming conversation with an employee who has been causing problems by not following the prescribed routines, and this has frustrated the head of the project the employee is currently a part of.⁴⁴ While talking about this person and the conversation, Easton reflects on the opportunity to use coaching so he can discover more about this person. This leads him to a more generic reflection on the opportunity to use a coaching approach to look for and even help people to *discover* their talents and skills:

This is kind of important in such a coach-coachee conversation, discovering who you are here. In relation to colleagues, in relation to work tasks, in relation to the firm in itself. Who am I in this? That’s interesting. That, I think....if we manage to do things this way, I believe that the penny will drop for a lot of us, you know.

Here Easton expresses an experience of the possibility of enrichment through his wish to open up towards the other person. He wants to facilitate exploration and discovery of both talents and skills, some of which this person may be aware of and not aware of. He connects coaching to such discovery by underscoring the importance of helping the other person “*discovering who you are here*”. In using the adverb “*here*” he points out the connection between the person and the work context. What Easton

⁴³ He uses the English word here.

⁴⁴ A different leader than Easton.

wants to achieve is deeper knowledge, both for himself and for the other person, where he sees the other person as “*here*”, meaning in relation to the work context. He connects coaching; “*such a coach-coachee conversation*”, to the possibility of getting to know more about the employees’ relations to various aspects of the job: “*colleagues*”, “*work tasks*” and “*the firm itself*”.

For Easton, coaching is about coming to know more about who the employee is. The phrase “*to do things this way*” might point to the ability to help the other person discover more of who he is in relation to the workplace and work processes. By using the plural pronoun “*we*”, rather than the singular, subjective “*I*”, Easton might be alluding to the wish to introduce this perspective in the organisation so that it becomes part of the company culture: if he and the other leaders manage to “*to do things this way*”, then “*the penny will drop for a lot of us*”. This seems to refer to the belief that if he takes a coaching approach and asks questions, something that will facilitate exploration and discovery of talents and skills, this will also entail positive consequences for the work processes. If people get more in touch with who they are in relation to various aspects of the work context, they will inevitably perform better.

In a different part of the interview Easton talks about the opportunity to be more curious and open in job interviews when talking with potential employees, and expresses the wish to “*not be so preoccupied with shaping the person. After having started here you will become this, then you will be an X’er (the name of the company), kind of*”. This excerpt indicates that Easton is searching for the ability to be open to the other person rather than merely shaping him into the organisation. When he talks about “*not be[ing] so preoccupied with shaping the person*”, this might indicate a shift in his thinking. He used to be preoccupied with shaping people, but now he wants to work differently. It might also suggest that he wants to challenge the habitual pattern in his organisation in which one is normally “*preoccupied with*” shaping people into the company.

It seems like coaching has brought a new element into his leadership, a possible way of exploring more of who the person is, and facilitating the other persons’ process of discovering more of who he is and what he can contribute to the organisation, rather than merely being “*preoccupied*” with “*shaping*” the other person, which might mean looking for the qualities that he knows are needed in the company. If he has been enabled to be more open to employees and look for their skills and talents, both when it comes to his current employees and potential ones, this

might also facilitate better work performance. He is looking for more than a good match between the job and the person: he is suggesting a dynamic relationship between the two. The current and potential employee might actively contribute to “*shaping*” the organisation through skills and qualities which might be hidden both to him as the leader and to the employee himself, rather than merely looking to form the person in such a way that he fits into the organisation. This might be an expression of a wish to establish contact with the other person by opening up to being surprised and enriched by the other person’s qualities, skills and talents.

This completes the section on enrichment.

5.3.4. Summary of the connectedness category

The experience of connectedness is an important part of the experience of coaching leadership, as expressed by the leaders in this study. Learning about coaching and implementing coaching into one’s leadership contributes to becoming more aware of the employee as a person and feeling more connected as persons. This experience is expressed in various ways, and is, in this instance, conveyed through three subcategories: care, influence and enrichment. In the care subcategory, connectedness is experienced as a consequence of getting involved in dialogues in which the employee shares personal information and which renders her vulnerable. This vulnerability stimulates the leader’s impulse to show care, empathy, compassion and concern, and entails a wish to help and find solutions. In the influence subcategory, connectedness is expressed through an experience of being enabled to influence employees in such a way that change might occur. Unless a certain connectedness is experienced in terms of managing to work together with the other person in a common understanding of a given situation, real influence is difficult to achieve. In the last subcategory, enrichment, an experience of connectedness is expressed by the leaders in terms of coaching that enables them to discover more of the other person’s resources, skills, talents and capabilities. A coaching approach is connected to the experience of being or the opportunity to be surprised by what can be achieved if the leader manages to open up towards the other person. If the leaders let go of the control factor and the impulse to provide answers and solutions, one might be surprised and enriched by the employees’ resources.

5.4. Chapter summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study have been presented and analysed. The main categories self-confidence, integration and connectedness have been analysed through their respective three subcategories: confirmation, commitment and mastery, personal change, coachability and junction, and care, influence and enrichment. In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed in relation to theory and previous research.

6. Discussion

This study indicates that the experience of coaching leadership is about feeling more self-confident as a leader, experiencing that coaching in some way or another becomes an integrated part of who one is or what one does as a leader, and feeling more connected with one's employees. In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed in relation to theory and previous research. The discussion will be organised according to two different approaches: it will be structured in part according to the main categories presented in chapter 5, and in part according to themes that cross the category system. However, all the categories from the analysis chapter will be covered in various ways. The empirical findings are here discussed in relation to theory and research in sections 6.1 to 6.5. The self-confidence category is mainly discussed in section 6.1, while the connectedness category is chiefly discussed in sections 6.2. and 6.3 and the integration category is for the most part discussed in section 6.5. In section 6.4, a more overarching perspective on the findings is taken and elements from all the categories are included in one way or another. However, as noted above, none of these sections discusses only *one* main finding: rather, elements from several categories appear in each of the five sections.

When quotations from the data material are presented here, it is to exemplify and underpin arguments in the discussion. In the few instances where new quotations are introduced, they do not represent new analytical entities, but rather are used to illuminate points in the discussion. In section 6.6, possible implications of the findings will be presented, limitations will be outlined and proposals for further research will be made. In the final section of this chapter, some concluding remarks will be given.

6.1. The experiential dimension of coaching leadership

The phenomenological exploration of experience is a pervasive dimension in this thesis, both in the methodological approach and the theoretical foundation. Since *the experiential dimension of coaching leadership* is the objective of the research, how can this be the headline of one of the main sections in the discussion chapter where the *findings* are to be discussed? The rationale behind this is that the experiential dimension of coaching leadership is also related to one of the main *findings* of the study: by being more attentive to the experience of both the employee and

themselves, the leaders experience more *self-confidence* in handling the leadership challenges they are facing. In the following, the self-confidence dimension of the findings will be discussed, particularly in relation to the Rogerian (1961/2004) concept of experience being the “highest authority” in the helping relationship.

6.1.1. The experience of the leader or the employee?

This thesis investigates the experience of the *coach*, which is, in this instance, the *coaching leader*. In the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, however, one could argue that it is the process of growth and development of the *coachee* that is being conceptualised. Translated and transferred from the field of counselling and therapy, through the context of professional coaching and then to the leadership context, it could be objected that these concepts are better suited for understanding and explaining the experience of the *employee* than that of the leader, insofar as it is the *leader* who is considered to be the *coach* and the *employee* who is considered to be the *coachee*.

However, the existential-humanistic framework outlined in this thesis, specifically the person-centred theory of Carl Rogers, is, in this instance, considered adequate to explaining the experience of both the coach and the coachee. As shown in Chapter 2, experience is a conspicuous part of the person-centred theory in that experience is believed to govern peoples’ lives, whether they are aware of it or not, and is thereby given the role as a navigational instrument in the helping relationship.⁴⁵ The experience of the client is considered to be the “touchstone of validity” (Rogers, 1961/2004) in the helping process. However, the experience of the helper is, similarly, considered an inevitable part of the process: In coaching, the coach and the coachee are considered to be parts of each other’s perceptual and experiential fields (Allan & Whybrow, 2008). If the coach is not capable of acknowledging and accepting her experience in the encounter, she will not be able to assist the coachee in accepting *her* experience (Rogers, 1961/2004, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). For this reason, it is assumed that the experience of the coaching leader is as relevant to discuss from the point of view of existential-humanistic oriented theories as that of the employee.

⁴⁵ Rogers (1942, 1959, 1961/2004, 1980/1995) uses the terms counselling and therapy, however, it has been argued in Chapter 2 that the concepts of person-centred theory are transferable to the coaching context (Joseph, 2014; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008). The terms coaching, coach and coachee are therefore used in this chapter, also whilst directly referring to concepts from person-centred theory – in addition to the terms “helping relationship” “helper” and “helpee”.

6.1.2. Self-confidence as acceptance of experience

One of the main findings of this study indicates that coaching leadership involves an experience of self-confidence. The idea of self-confidence and self-esteem is at the heart of Rogerian theory (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). The coach aims at helping the coachee feel more confident about herself by becoming more trusting and accepting towards her own experience. It is assumed that the lack of trust in one's primary experience in early childhood might lead to an outer locus of evaluation in life (Rogers, 1959). Consequently, if a person encounters an accepting attitude, she is encouraged to be in contact with her own resources and the process of self-actualisation might unfold without her experience being distorted (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004).

When leaders learn about and apply coaching in their leadership practice, this study finds that self-confidence is enhanced and reinforced. In other words, an approach, tool, theory or method that is designed to assist the coachee (in this case, the employee) in releasing her potential seems to also enhance and strengthen the self-confidence of the coach (in this case, the leader). In some instances, attending the coaching course has been a process of awakening in which the leader has gradually become more accepting towards and confident about herself. It seems that learning about coaching, testing and training the methods and tools, and receiving feedback in the course setting, and thereupon testing some of the same methods and techniques in the leadership context, has entailed an experience of establishing contact with whom one feels like being (Gendlin, 1962/1997; Rogers, 1959). The self-confidence expressed by some of the leaders seems to be a profound, transformative existential experience that affects and pervades the leader's "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1927/1962). The experience of becoming more accepting and confident about oneself influences the leader's entire being, and thus also her leadership. By becoming more generally self-confident as a person, the leader is now also more confident about the choices she is making as a leader.

It might be questioned whether the experience of becoming more accepting towards and confident about oneself conveys the lived experience of *coaching leadership* – or of *being influenced by a coaching course*. Could it be that the increased self-confidence has nothing to do with coaching leadership as such, but is rather connected to, for instance, the way in which the leader is treated by participants

and teachers? One could speculate whether a course about HR management, or even a beginners' course in a foreign language, for that matter, could have entailed a similar experience of increased and reinforced self-confidence?

Several elements can connect the experience of self-confidence to the lived experience of coaching leadership, rather than merely to the coaching course. First, when a leader is confirmed as a person, for her way of being in the encounter with others and in the group of participants in the course, she might simultaneously be confirmed as a coach, since the way of being in the human encounter is a crucial dimension of the existential-humanistic understanding of coaching (Joseph, 2014; Rogers, 1959, 1980/1995). For instance, when Henry receives confirmation in the course that he is an "honest" and "open" person, his self-confidence in relation to being in the role of the coach might increase since such qualities are associated with the coach's way of being in the relationship. The concept of congruence, also referred to as genuineness or transparency, is a crucial quality of a helper, according to the person-centred theory, and honesty and openness are considered core dimensions of this concept (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

Second, coaching implies accepting and confirming the coachee in her wholeness as a human being (Whitmore et al., 2009). This might indicate that the experience of being confirmed and accepted as a person in the coaching course is connected to the substantial nature of the course. One might believe that the coaching theory of accepting and confirming other persons has been manifested and lived by teachers and participants in the context of the coaching course.

Third, the leaders express in interviews that have taken place up to one and a half years after the termination of the coaching course that they experience personal change as a consequence of having learned about and used coaching in their leadership. This indicates that the experience of self-confidence might have been stimulated by the way in which the leader was treated in the course setting, but that something has been established within herself that has been added to the leaders' life, whether in the leadership context or in other life arenas, which makes this experience sustainable.

In the following, the concept of congruence will be discussed in relation to the self-confidence of the coaching leader.

6.1.3. Self-confidence and congruence

As mentioned above, the existential-humanistic perspective on coaching emanating from person-centred theory proposes that the coaching process is about becoming more self-directed and establishing an inner locus of control (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). However, it is argued that to help the coachee recognise and accept her primary experience, the coach must also be able to recognise, accept and trust her *own* experience, and in this way show an inner locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1959). This process is referred to as congruence, meaning the coach's capacity to be true to her own experience in the encounter with the coachee (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

The experience of coaching leadership seems connected to such a process of becoming more self-directed, accepting, trusting and self-confident. For instance, Ralph expresses that he is "*not dead certain about anything at all*", whereas virtually in the same breath he says that "*I'm not afraid of anything anymore*". This might be indicative of the coaching leader's expanded capacity to hold, contain and accept his experience, even in cases where it implies insecurities and contradictions, which is illustrative of the experience of congruence (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

In the following, the experience of self-confidence will be explained in relation to the concept of occupational self-efficacy.

6.1.4. Self-confidence and occupational self-efficacy

In the data from this study it has been found that, in addition to being connected to the acceptance of one's experience, the experience of self-confidence is expressed in terms of feeling better equipped to perform one's leadership practice. The leaders experience that they are enabled to solve leadership tasks in more adequate ways as a result of learning about and using coaching within their leadership. This dimension of self-confidence might be connected to the concept of self-efficacy, which involves the belief in one's capacity to exercise the behaviour needed to achieve given outcomes (Bandura, 1997).

In their meta-analysis, Judge, Erez, and Bono (1998) found that self-efficacy was linked to self-esteem and locus of control, among other factors. Self-efficacy can thus be related to the self-confidence concept in this thesis, which is, as shown above, also connected to such constructs as self-esteem and locus of control (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). Furthermore, general and domain specific self-

efficacy have been found to correlate and influence each other (Schyns & von Collani, 2002; Shelton, 1990; Sherer et al., 1982). In other words, when people experience a high level of self-efficacy at work, they are also likely to experience a high level of self-efficacy in other arenas of life, and the other way around.

In her survey study with line managers, Anderson (2013) examined the relationship between the managers' occupational self-efficacy and their propensity to coach their employees. The managers all belonged to organisations that were "*known to be interested in coaching at work*" (p. 256). Bearing this in mind, it can be assumed that they had some degree of knowledge about or competence in coaching. The results showed a positive correlation: the higher the score on occupational self-efficacy, the greater the likelihood that the managers would coach their employees. While the present study can be seen as support of these findings, it also suggests the opposite hypothesis: By coaching their employees, leaders experience increased confidence in the choices they are making as leaders, and they feel better able to perform their leadership and solve leadership tasks, which might be understood in relation to the concept of occupational self-efficacy (Anderson, 2013; Sherer et al., 1982). In other words, this research indicates that when leaders coach their employees this leads to an increase in occupational self-efficacy.

In the following, the issue of experience being the highest authority will be discussed in relation to the work context.

6.1.5. How can experience be the highest authority in the work context?

One critique which is often voiced against Rogerian theory (Johannessen et al., 2010), and which is actualised in the work context, is that Rogers' (1961/2004) pragmatic emphasis on experience as being the highest authority and the touchstone of validity is likely to be mistaken for rejecting any ethical or normative standards. Rogers' focus on an unconditional positive regard as one of the crucial principles in the encounter with another person, no matter how great the discrepancy is between the values or attitudes expressed by this person and one's own values and beliefs (Rogers, 1961/2004, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991), might create the image of an almost invisible coach without backbone or integrity. In the leadership context, such an interpretation of Rogerian theory would be problematic.

As repeated time and again in this thesis, the leader's primary and overriding task is to lead the organisation, that is to influence the ensemble of employees towards

a common goal (Northouse, 2007; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 2010). If misunderstood, Rogers' proposed principles of the authority of experience could imply that the leader's authority should be annulled to enhance the experience of every person in the organisation. There would be as many "authorities" as there were employees to take into consideration at all times, implying that no decision would be made.

It is not suggested in this thesis that a leader should not, at any time, disclose her opinions, make decisions or promote values and norms. These are, on the contrary, considered crucial leadership tasks and qualities (Locke, 2003; Stelter, 2014a). As posited by Aschen and Dræby (2004), the communication between the leader and the employee is conditioned by guidelines from a third party that is made up of, for example, shareholders, board members and government agencies and bodies. These two authors even suggest that the "*highest authority' is the main task*" (Aschen & Dræby, 2004, p. 59, my translation, authors' brackets). Paradoxical as it might seem, this fact is also acknowledged in this thesis, both as a basic premise of coaching leadership and as also manifested by the leadership definition above. However, it is believed that the principle of making experience "the highest authority" is still relevant, applicable and adequate in the leadership context as a guiding principle in the communication with employees. This does not imply that the employees' opinions, assumptions and aspirations replace the leader's decision-making authority (Locke, 2003) or the authority of the "goal rationality" and the "main task" (Aschen & Dræby, 2004). However, it means that the leader considers experience to be an important part of any leadership and organisational processes. In other words, the personal and relational experiential dimension of the professional processes is acknowledged (Kvalsund, 2005a).

This aspect is reflected in the data from this study, particularly in the connectedness category. When experience is allowed to come to the foreground and be explored in the conversation, it seems that the leader manages to influence the employee in a more satisfying and sustainable way than if the conversation unfolds in a one-way instructional manner. For instance, when Terry gives employees instructions and says: "*you've got to do it this or that way*", the employees often respond by saying: "*yes, fine, I'll do it*". However, after the conversation, it turns out that "*they don't do it anyway!*" In such situations, it might be that the experiential dimension has not been granted enough space in the conversation. There is a discrepancy between what happens on an outward action level and an inward

experiential level. This might be the case when Terry's employee expresses that she accepts the instruction and the conditions and solutions offered by the leader in the conversation, but at the action level, it turns out that she does not "*do it anyway*".

However, by learning about coaching, leaders experience that they are enabled to handle conversations in more effective ways by including the experiential dimension (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). When the employee is encouraged to share and explore her experience in relation to the issue in question, this entails an experience of connectedness and cooperation. For instance, Peter describes a conversation in which the employee was allowed to explore his experience further, guided by Peter's questions, and during the conversation the experience of the employee changed diametrically: he did not want to perform the task at the outset, but he now felt confident and comfortable about doing it.

As shown in Chapter 2, the paradoxical theory of change introduced by Beisser (1970) suggests that once experience is acknowledged and accepted, it is likely to change. The same assumption underlies person-centred theory (Rogers, 1961/2004). When Terry expresses that he can now more often through coaching approach his employees in a "*completely different way*", he replaces the instructional approach with "*open questions*", and through this he experiences that his employees commit to the agreed-upon results in ways that also prove to be effective at the action level after the conversation. It seems that when employees are allowed and encouraged to express their opinions, reflections, ideas and experience on the issue in question, the change that the leader wants is more likely to be implemented in practice.

The authority given to experience in the context of coaching leadership is about finding a way of balancing and combining the ability to make room for experience, on the one hand, and convey norms and make decisions, on the other hand (Locke, 2003; Stelter, 2014a). As an example of this dynamic, Carrie expresses that she does not "*see the contrast in being a leader and having a coaching attitude*". She maintains that a part of being a leader is to give "*information about how things will be*". However, once this information has been given, she might "*be aware of the person, to whom you give this information*". Raising awareness by exploring experience is a central dimension of coaching from a gestalt perspective (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Bluckert, 2014). However, it is not suggested that the exploration of experience will inevitably and causally lead to any issue being resolved and any

conversation ending with the leader and the employee agreeing and harmonising. Finding the balance between exploring and deciding, asking and conveying is likely to involve tension and conflicting interests, and an important leader task is to lead people through such phases and situations (McClure, 1998).

The ability of the leader to balance and combine different interests, perspectives and needs might be understood in relation to the principle posited by Rogers (1959) in the example of the child who hits her little sister that was presented in Chapter 2, section 2.3.1. The parent might in this situation contain the conflicting interests of his two children by both accepting the experience of the child who feels good about hitting her little sister, while at the same time conveying a normative, ethical stance with respect to the little sister who is being hit. Without any further comparison of the leader as a parent and the employee as a child one can, in the same way, argue that the leader might allow experience to come to the foreground to be explored, while also communicating norms and predetermined solutions (Locke, 2003). In other words, concepts from person-centred theory seem to underpin the theoretical possibility of coaching leadership, even with the leader's decision-making authority as an ever-present background for the communication.

The self-confidence dimension of coaching leadership as manifested in the findings of this study has been discussed here in relation to the experiential concept of Rogers (1961/2004), among other perspectives. In the following, the experience of connectedness, which stands out as a key dimension in the experience of coaching leadership in this study will be discussed in relation to the concept of interdependence.

6.2. Interdependence in the leader-employee relationship

From the above-presented perspectives and discussions it might seem as though coaching leadership is merely a one-way process in which the leader to a large degree allows the employee's experience to be explored in the encounter between the two in such a way that more effective change processes might unfold. This reflects to a certain degree the tendency found in the data from this study: mutuality and reciprocal dimensions are not particularly conspicuous. It could be that this element is not important to the leaders. As long as they are able to achieve the results they are after through coaching, the question of, for instance, whether the employee understands the

leader or whether the leader is allowed to explore *her* experience in the relationship between the two might be of little importance for the leaders in question.

Another reason why elements of mutuality and reciprocity are not the most apparent features of this data might be that the leader perspective is the focus of the investigation. It is only through the accounts of the leaders that we might gain understanding of some of the experiences of employees, and one can therefore only speculate as to the experience of the employee in relation to coaching leadership when taking the results of this study into consideration. When the question of mutuality and reciprocity is further explored below, however, the point is *not* to speculate about what the employees in the stories presented by the leaders in this study might have felt or thought but rather to principally ask whether there might be dimensions of reciprocity and mutuality in coaching leadership, as understood through the examples given by the leaders. This theme will be explored through the concept of interdependence.

6.2.1. Interdependence as co-actualisation

It has been argued in Chapter 2 that the concept of self-actualisation does not inherently conflict with the pursuit of a common good (Kvalsund, 2003a). On the contrary, self-actualisation involves a deeper kind of altruism than the one in which the individual ignores her own primary experience in favour of a secondary experience created by, for instance, the expectations of other people (Rogers, 1959). The latter form of altruism can be seen when the child refrains from hitting her little sister out of fear of being punished or reprimanded, or perhaps worse, not being loved by her parent (Rogers, 1959). In the former kind of altruism, on the contrary, the primary experience is acknowledged and accepted, while at the same time the experience of wanting to do good to others might arise from an inner locus of evaluation (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959). In this perspective, the dichotomy between self-actualisation and altruism is annulled. Self-actualisation is inherently altruistic in that it allows for each party in a relationship or group to own, symbolise and communicate one's primary experience (Kvalsund, 2003a).

However, the term co-actualisation, which has emerged as a development of Rogerian theory, might itself allude to a more collective orientation than the term self-actualisation (Ivey et al., 2012). According to Ivey et al. (2012), co-actualisation can be described as *“a process of growth and development that is stimulated by the*

unique and on-going relational interactions two or more persons have with one another that result in a mutual actualization of untapped potential for all the people involved” (p. 373). In other words, there is an element of mutuality and reciprocity in the co-actualising relationship.

This study indicates that the experience of coaching leadership involves an experience of connectedness, that is, leaders feel more connected to their employees as a result of using coaching within their leadership practice. This experience might be understood in relation to the concept of co-actualisation, both on a practical, action oriented, cooperative level, and on a more existential level. In the former understanding, connectedness involves an experience of coming closer to one’s employees. By asking more questions and by basically being more interested, curious or wondering when facing the experience of the employee, the leader discovers the resources of the employee in new ways and realises how the work process might be enriched by the capacities of the employee. However, this experience also seems to involve that the leader feels more enabled and capable to perform her leadership practice, as shown in the section on self-confidence above. Discovering more of the employee’s resources inevitably seems to imply being more connected to one’s own resources: when the leader and the employee enter a more cooperative relationship, the potential and capacity of both the leader and the employee seem to be realised.

This, in turn, might involve an experience of shared and distributed responsibility and leadership (Locke, 2003). McCauley et al. (2008) suggest that interdependent leadership cultures regard leadership as a collective activity that *“requires mutual inquiry and learning”* (p. 3). This study suggests that leaders experience their leadership practice as a shared and mutual process, as a result of learning about and using coaching within their leadership practice. For instance, Andrew expresses that *“walking the process together with another person”* is something which *“creates energy”* for him as a leader. Working more closely together with one’s employees and promoting a more cooperative, shared way of leading involves discovering and feeling enriched by the employees, as well as feeling more connected to one’s own resources as a leader.

At a more existential level, the experience of connectedness might relate to co-actualisation in terms of the concepts transformative dialogue and interdependency, as posited in Chapter 2. Several stories have been told by leaders in this study where the employees’ sharing of their personal experiences entails an experience of care and

concern, a wish to be of help on the part of the leader. Situations initiated by the leader's need to reprimand employees' undesirable behaviour tend to end up with a changed perception of the employee that in turn, induces situations for which solutions can be found. However, the pursuit of a solution is now driven by a different motive than the initial one, that of correcting the employee's unwanted behaviour. Now, it is rather motivated by the leader's care, concern and wish to be of help. For instance, when Morris learns that his peripheral and absent-minded employee, who causes problems at the organisational systemic level, is struggling with a difficult break-up of a relationship, he experiences an impulse to help and show care and concern for the employee, which moves the initial need to reprimand the employee's behaviour to the background. This experience might be understood as one of deep existential human connectedness: When the leader discovers and acknowledges the humanity of the employee, he is existentially connected to his own humanity. In the terminology of Buber (1958/2000), the leader and employee meet as persons in an "I" - "Thou" relationship, rather than merely as roles or objects in an "I"- "It" relationship.

Studies by Schulte-Rüther, Markovitsch, Fink, and Piefke (2007) and Damasio (2003) have confirmed the function of so-called "mirror neurons"; when a person observes another who experiences something, the same neurological activity is found in the observer as in the experiencing person. However, this occurs in relationships characterised by positive regard, respect, acceptance and empathy, which are conditions of relationships that foster self-actualisation (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004, 1980/1995) and co-actualisation (Ivey et al., 2012). In encountering the experience of the employee, one might believe that the leader shares the employee's experience and thus experiences a basic, existential connectedness with the employee.

In the following, interdependence is discussed in relation to the idea of including and transcending the dependence and independence dimensions.

6.2.2. Promoting interdependence by refusing to be the expert

It has been argued that to achieve interdependent qualities in a relationship, both the state of dependency and independency must be transcended (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Dependence is characteristic of organisations in which it is assumed that "*only people in positions of authority are responsible for leadership*" (McCauley et al., 2008; p. 3). Transcending the dependency aspect of a relationship and, ultimately of a culture, involves, in other words, seeing leadership as a shared

activity and responsibility. As shown above, it seems from the findings of this study that coaching leadership entails an experience of shared leadership (Locke, 2003) in terms of becoming more cooperative and connected to one's employees.

For instance, Adam talks about an efficient, time-saving experience of taking the role of the facilitator in a phone conversation with an employee. Initially, the employee expected him to provide a solution to the issue in question. However, Adam insisted on taking a facilitative approach by asking questions rather than providing the solution the employee was after. Schein (2009) suggests that in helping situations in which one person asks another for help, the helper is likely to assume the role of the expert when he is expected to do so by the helpee. Insisting on a facilitative approach is challenging because it might involve the fear of losing respect and credibility in the eyes of the other as one does not directly meet the other person's expectations. In the terminology of Macmurray (1961/1999), this entails a maintenance of dependency in the relationship.

If, however, the helper challenges the helpee to think for herself and search for her own solutions to the situation, the helpee might experience more independency in the relationship. This might entail an experience of empowerment on the part of the helpee: an increased feeling of establishing contact with her own capabilities to resolve her own challenges (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014; Rogers, 1961/2004). As mentioned above, Falk (2010) alludes to the metaphor of teaching the hungry person to fish rather than giving her a fish, and claims that helpful help is essentially about helping someone to become more enabled to help herself.

Thinking about Adam's case, he did not immediately know how to answer his employee or what solution to suggest for the issue in question, so it could appear that taking a facilitative approach was the result of necessity. However, he states that he could as well have "*thrown out*" an answer as a response to the employee's request, although premature and weakly embedded. Holding tight to the facilitative approach therefore seems to be an intended choice on his part. By solely asking questions, a solution was found to the issue by the employee herself in short order.

In such a situation, a mutual experience of taking advantage of and being enriched by each other's resources might unfold. A solution which both parties might commit to can be found, while at the same time both parties can feel empowered and enriched: The leader feels enriched by the other person's capability and knowledge, and her ability to find a solution. At the same time, the leader might feel self-

confident in her role because it is through her questions and facilitative approach that the solution might be found. The employee, on the other hand, might feel skilled and competent in that she is able to find a solution herself. At the same time, she might feel accepted and supported by her leader, and thus feel good about herself and her achievement. This is likely to promote further self-efficacy and self-confidence on the part of the employee. In such a case, it seems that a mutual, synergetic spiral of acceptance, confirmation, self-efficacy and self-confidence might unfold.

In such a situation it could be asked, however, whether the employee could have found the solution herself from the beginning, since it turns out that she is indeed capable of doing so. In the interdependent culture advocated by McCauley et al. (2008), it could be imagined that this might be one of the consequences: power is shared by the leader in terms of trusting the employees' capabilities to find their own solutions to any question or challenge they might have, and the employees respond to the trust from the leader by taking charge themselves and resolving whatever challenge arises. However, it could be argued that such a culture promotes independence rather than interdependence (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; Macmurray, 1961/1999). The interrelatedness and interdependence of the persons involved is ignored in favour of independence.

For instance, in cases like the one presented by Adam, it might be argued that the contact and dialogue between the leader and the employee introduce an added value: the interconnectedness and interdependence that emerge between the two. Such a conversation does not only occasion a solution to the issue in question, it might as well imply an experience of human connectedness and enrichment. The leader and the employee experience an interdependent way of relating to each other, both on an action-oriented, cooperative level, and on a more existential level. On the action level, the mutual inquiry and learning characteristic of an interdependent culture (McCauley et al. 2008) is promoted, in the sense that at the outset both parties are dependent on, and as a result, enriched by, each other's competences and capabilities. Isaacs' (1999) understanding of dialogue as: "*a shared inquiry, a way of thinking a reflecting together*" (p. 9) might illuminate this experience. The leader and the employee engage in a dialogue where the dynamic of the situation ensures that both persons use their resources to arrive at a common solution.

Another aspect of this situation might be found at a more existential level. In a conversation in which the leader facilitates the competence of the employee, as

illustrated in the case of Adam, an existential interconnectedness might arise in the relation between the two. In encouraging reflection and exploration, the leader acknowledges and accepts the other person and shows a basic trust in the other's resources (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). This is then likely to entail an experience on the part of the other person of accepting and trusting herself (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). On the other hand, in responding to the leader's facilitative approach by reflecting on and exploring the issue, the employee shows trust in and confirms the leader's competence as a facilitator. This involves in the same way an acceptance from the employee that might in turn allow the leader to be accepting towards herself (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004). In Rogerian theory, the experience of feeling valued and appreciated for who one is, is seen as the corner stone of human growth and development (Kvalsund, 2003a; Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). As such, it might be argued that in a process in which the leader and employee confirm, accept and trust each other, a co-actualising relationship might emerge (Fikse, 2013; Ivey et al., 2012).

In situations such as the one presented by Adam, the two parties involved agree upon the basic conditions of the encounter (Alrø, 2011). As a consequence, what might be described as a coaching process between the two, in terms of the leader taking a facilitative approach where asking questions is the basic intervention (Kvalsund, 2005a), unfolds in a relatively "frictionless" manner. The leader asks questions and the employee reflects and responds, and a commonly and mutually accepted solution is thus found.⁴⁶ However, the employee could as well have responded by demanding that the leader should act as the expert, refusing in this way to assume the role of the explorative respondent in the conversation, as in the example which was elaborated on in Chapter 2, section 2.8.2.1, where dimensions of dependence and independence are explored and discussed. The power aspects of such an imagined case are further explored in the section below which has a critical view on the coaching leadership discourse.

A different aspect, which is actualised in relation to cases such as the one described by Adam, however, is that the leader is, by virtue of being the leader,

⁴⁶ In relation to coaching leadership, one might as well imagine the opposite case: the employee asks the leader questions in order to help *her* clarify *her* perspectives, reflections and experience on an issue. Such a two-way process is characteristic of a coaching culture (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005) in which coaching becomes a way of being and working together in the organisation on all levels and in all directions, that is, anyone can, principally, be in the role of the coach towards anyone else in the organisation. This perspective is not predominant in the data in this study, and therefore, this section does not include this aspect. However, the question of a coaching culture will be further addressed below.

ultimately responsible for the solution that one arrives at in the conversation (Locke, 2003). Bearing this in mind, one might imagine that the employee turns to her leader not only to find a solution to the issue in question but just as much to have the solution legitimated, confirmed and approved by the leader. In Adam's case, he had no specific preference as to the conclusion of the conversation and therefore might have approved of any solution to the issue in question. However, a question arises in relation to coaching leadership as to what might have happened in a situation in which the leader knew what solution he would have preferred and found the solution that the employee had arrived at to be unsatisfactory (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). Would such a situation be illustrative of the boundary of coaching leadership? Does this kind of normative "knowing" on the part of the leader disqualify a coaching approach since coaching seems to require a non-normative, non-judgemental non-directive attitude (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph 2014)?

In one of the focus groups in this study, where this issue was actualised, Neil expressed that when the leader has a solution in mind he cannot coach, but should rather "*point*", which alludes to a more directive, instructive approach. A more common view expressed in the data from this study, however, is that the leaders associate coaching with something that can be used to make the employees do what the leaders want them to do. Such a perspective raises both theoretical and ethical questions. Theoretical, because such a view breaks with the coaching principle of non-directivity, as understood from an existential-humanistic point of view (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014). Ethical, because such interventions might be associated with manipulating behaviour. In the following, both these perspectives will be discussed in relation to the concepts of influence, manipulation and actualisation.

6.2.3. Influence, manipulation or actualisation?

Several leaders in this study experience changes in their leadership at various points as a result of bridling the impulse to conclude or find solutions, where they rather ask questions and await the perspective and response of the employee. When the employee arrives at the conclusion herself, this is experienced as more effective by the leaders than if the leader had provided the answer or solution. As expressed by Andrew, he therefore tries, according to what he has learned about coaching, to refrain from being "*the oracle who hands down instructions and commands and gives the answers to everything and anything*".

However, if the leader knows the direction she wants the conversation to take, can this be considered coaching? Would such a situation not be objectionable to the fundamental principle of the self-directedness of the coachee (Joseph, 2014)? Can it still be called coaching if the employee arrives at the conclusion that the leader has had in mind, but has throughout the process had the experience of having arrived at this conclusion on her own? Such questions assert themselves in the leadership context because of the leader's involvement in (Stelter, 2013), and ultimate responsibility for (Yukl, 2010) the employee's work processes (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013).

The concept of influence has emerged as a key aspect of coaching leadership in this study. Coaching is used as a way of influencing people to achieve organisational goals, and in many situations this implies correcting the employees' maladaptive behaviour. However, leaders find subtler ways of arriving at the desired result through coaching. Instead of trying to persuade or instruct people to change, they discover that by coaching, they might achieve the change they are after, but in more effective and sustainable ways. By using a coaching approach, leaders experience that the sought-for change emerges from within the employee herself, instead of being imposed from outside. The leader "pushes the buttons" that lead to change processes within the employees, and in this way the situation ends where the leader wants it to end: the employee discovers for herself the need or desire to do things differently.

O'Neill (2007) cautions that coaching leadership must not replace performance management in such a way that the leader coaches the employees to do what she wants. It might seem, however, that this is the situation described by the leaders in this study, particularly in the influence subcategory. For instance, Henry expresses: *"I rather lead them to where I want them to be, without them necessarily realising that much themselves"*. A question that arises is whether such an approach and intervention can be considered coaching. In Chapter 5, the term "leading the horse to the water" has been applied to reveal analytical ideas and thoughts about the experience of coaching that seem to be promoted by the leaders. The question is whether leading someone to a predetermined "place" through coaching can, in fact, be considered coaching? For instance, James' statement: *"You can lead the coachee in a direction, right?"* seems to be a direct contrast to the existential-humanistic approach to coaching, where the direction is supposed to be determined by the coachee (Joseph,

2014). In the following, this situation will be discussed in more detail by looking into the concepts of manipulation and actualisation.

6.2.3.1. Manipulation versus actualisation

Manipulation has been described as a “fundamentally dishonest” behaviour (Johannessen et al., 2010). It is associated with tricking someone into believing, or wanting something without them being aware of it. According to Kotter (1990), a manipulator attempts to: “*channel behaviour exactly where he wants it*” (p. 64). The image of a person standing above a marionette, leading the employee to do what she wants by pulling the different strings might illustrate the essence of manipulative behaviour. Manipulation implies that the person being manipulated is not aware of the process leading to the desired result (Ivey et al., 2012; Kotter, 1990). Furthermore, manipulating behaviour within the organisational context has been associated with pseudo-democratic processes in which the manager pretends to involve people by, for instance, asking their opinions, but arranges the process in such a way that one arrives at the desired conclusion or solution (Kotter, 1990).

However, the term manipulation might as well hold positive connotations. For instance, Trotzer (1999) suggests that: “*All manipulating behaviours have counterparts that are potentially beneficial to the effector and the recipient of the action*” (p. 225). Furthermore, it has been suggested that manipulation is at the one end of a continuum where actualisation is at the other end (Shostrom, 1967), and it is argued that manipulating behaviours might be transformed into positive actualisation in the social interplay (Shostrom, 1967; Trotzer, 1999). Bearing this in mind, might there be alternative ways of regarding the process of coaching the employees to do what the leaders want, which seems like a key aspect of the experience of coaching leadership in this study?

6.2.4. Empathy – but the other way around?

When leaders in this study express that they use coaching to make the employees do what they want, the purpose seems to be to make the employee see the world from her perspective, through her eyes, to make the employee see what she sees, and through this, make her discover the need to “*do things differently*”, as expressed by Terry. This might seem like the opposite of what is described as empathy, which is seen as a key relational condition for enhancing growth and development (Rogers, 1961/1994,

1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). When it comes to empathy, it has been shown that for the coach to communicate an empathic attitude to the coachee, the coach must be able to transcend her own view of the situation and enter the life-world of the coachee, whilst at the same time maintaining her own life-world so as not to lose herself to the life-world of the other person (Rogers, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991).

In the transformative dialogue, it has been shown that the coach is similarly able to respond to the “otherness” of the other person while at the same time maintaining her own independency in the relationship (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). In such a dialogue, there is, in other words, both an element of connectedness and separateness. A crucial dimension is, however, the willingness of both persons to let themselves be influenced and ultimately transformed by the otherness of the other person (Buber, 1958/2000; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; Stelter, 2014a).

It might be questioned, however, how open the leader is to change her perspective and let herself be transformed by the viewpoint of the other person when she has a clear agenda of changing the perspective of the employee, or, as Larry expresses it to: “*relocate the meanings of the employees*”. If the goal is set and the leader uses coaching in an attempt to make the other person see what she sees in order to make her do what she wants her to do, can this be understood as coaching, which is essentially about enhancing and encouraging the self-directedness of the coachee (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph, 2014)?

The concept of helping positions described in Chapter 3 might be helpful in understanding the dynamics of such situations. When the leader uses coaching to make the employee arrive at an already predetermined solution, conclusion or answer, the leader and the employee are in helping position 2: The employee has not asked for help, rather, it is the leader who needs “help” from the employee: the employee must “help” the leader by doing what the leader wants to reach organisational goals. Kierkegaard (1859) posits that at the heart of helping lies the helper’s ability to find the other person where she is. In some of the cases described in the data from this study it seems like the process of “finding” the employee, in the metaphorical sense, is crucial to enhance the process and lead to the desired result. As expressed by Ralph: “*I don’t think I will convince anyone, they’ll have to convince themselves*”. If the employee is to “convince herself”, it seems that the leader has to find the “soft spot” within the employee that is susceptible to different perspectives, and from which a change process might unfold.

However, this process of “finding the other” is, in such a case, not done with the purpose of helping, but with the aim of having the other person “help” oneself. It might be asked whether such a situation is ethically problematic, if it culminates in the employee discovering that this is what she wants, as if it were her own solution. Whether one calls such a process manipulation or not, can this be a constructive and rewarding process for both the leader and the employee? The leaders in this study experience that the employees in such situations “own” the solutions and therefore commit to them, which enhances the motivation to perform the task in question.

A question arises here as to whether such processes can in fact be understood as coaching, since the employees do not necessarily know that they are being coached, which is a basic condition of the coaching endeavour (Kvalsund, 2005a). However, this condition is connected to an understanding of coaching as a professional helping relationship (Kvalsund, 2005a), rather than to a perspective on coaching as an approach that can be taken by anyone, not merely by professional coaches. In the latter case, the question of whether it is unethical to coach someone who does not know she is being coached might seem as absurd as asking whether it is unethical in itself to listen attentively to someone (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008) or to ask someone questions (Berg, 2006). This is not to say, of course, that listening attentively to someone or asking someone questions cannot lead to consequences that might be considered unethical. The coaching-as-approach perspective on coaching leadership will be further elaborated on in section 6.6.1 below.

However, another problem with the way of using coaching that is promoted in the influence subcategory is the hidden agenda of the leader. Unlike the situation described by O’Neill (2005) in which expectations are clearly communicated to the employee and then coaching is used to, for instance, explore how a task might be resolved or how a process might be carried out, coaching is here used as a tool to communicate such expectations or predetermined solutions without the employee knowing it. But if the leader had communicated this expectation in the beginning, as suggested by O’Neill (2005), could she have already “lost” the employee, and then missed the chance to have her do what she wanted her to do? Another question that arises is: is it unethical in itself to want to influence someone in a predetermined direction?

Since the leadership definition that underpins this thesis sees leadership as essentially about influencing people in order to reach a common goal (Northouse, 2007), such a view would reject leadership in itself as an unethical endeavour. Bearing this in mind, for coaching leadership to be a theoretical possibility, it must be recognised that coaching will be used in some way or another with the aim of influencing someone towards a goal. As proposed by Aschen & Dræby (2004), the “goal rationality” of the context must be an implicit or explicit part of the communication between the leader and the employee, as posited in Chapter 3. The leader’s responsibility in attending to guidelines from this “third party”, comprising board members, stakeholders and societal guidelines (Aschen & Dræby, 2004), implies the *involvedness* of the leader in the processes that are addressed in the conversations between the leader and the employee. In the examples from the influence subcategory, the leader has a clear agenda of where she wants the process to end. The question of whether this kind of predetermined wish for a specific outcome in fact disqualifies a coaching approach and in this way contributes to making coaching leadership impossible will be addressed in sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 below.

In the following, the question of interdependence in coaching leadership will be discussed from an integral perspective.

6.2.4.1. *Shifting perspectives, shifting interests*

Lewin (1951) suggests that a person’s needs organise her perceptual field. Our needs determine and distinguish the elements of a scene, a situation, a view or a field that distinguishes the figure from the aspects that form the ground (Wheeler & Axelsson, 2015). From this perspective, a conflict between two persons might be understood as a tension between conflicting needs. In some situations described by the leaders in this study, the coaching process commences with what might be described as a conflicting situation. For instance, the employee who called Frank early in the mornings and cancelled her shifts created tension in the relationship between the two, as well as in the organisation.

Understood in light of Lewin’s (1951) theory, a leader’s need to maintain the routines in the organisation is likely to influence her perceptual field and impact her view of the organisation and the employees. However, according to the model which is based on Wilber’s (1995) integral theory and adopted into a gestalt-oriented perspective by Tønnesvang et al. (2013) (see figure 3 below), the leader’s perspective

on the situation, her perceptual field, can be re-organised by developing the ability to move from one viewpoint to another.

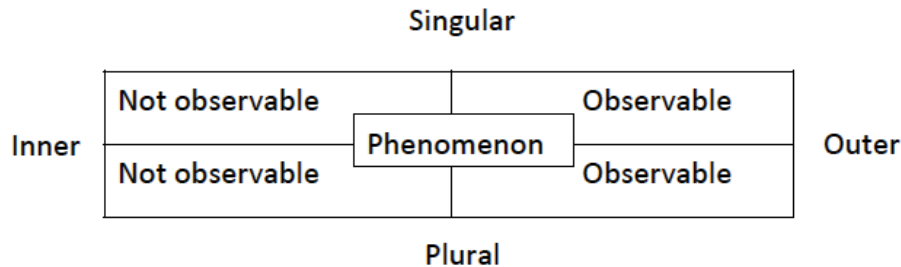


Figure 3: The integral model (re-introduced)

This figure is also presented in Chapter 3, but in order to facilitate the reading it is re-introduced here.

In cases presented by the leaders in this study, the leader’s view of the situation, her perceptual field, is expanded as a result of taking a coaching approach in the conversation with her employee. Due to the leader’s questions, the employee shares some of her phenomenological field (Kvalsund, 2003a; Macmurray, 1961/1999), her subjective experience of the problematic issue and reveals some of the information that has previously been hidden – it has not been observable (upper left quadrant) – to the leader.

For instance, before Frank’s employee shared her story about personal challenges related to circadian rhythm, Frank had deduced from her observable behaviour – the early phone calls in which she cancelled her shifts, and her absence (upper right quadrant) – that she was “*a shirker who couldn’t be bothered to get up in the morning*”. In such situations, one need that might organise the leader’s field (Lewin, 1951) is that a change must occur at the organisational level (lower right quadrant). In Frank’s case, this need could be related to the organisation as a system in that he wanted to decrease financial costs caused by the frequent cancelling of shifts, or reduce the sick leave rate in the organisation. The need that organises his perceptual field could also be personal: the need to sleep better in the early morning hours and not being rushed out of bed by the early phone calls and then needing to find a substitute at short notice.

However, when an employee shares how she feels about the issue in question, new information might re-organise the leader’s perceptual field (upper left quadrant),

from the need to resolve systemic challenges (lower right quadrant), to the need or impulse to help the employee change the gestalt, the relation between figure and ground (Lewin, 1951). For instance, in Frank's case, he realised that the "shirker" was a responsible person who called the leader early in the morning because she did not feel able to perform her work in a responsible way at the hours in question due to health-related challenges.

By expanding the perspective of the situation and letting oneself be influenced by the experience of the other person, one's action possibilities are likely to increase (Allan & Whybrow, 2008; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013; Tønnesvang et al., 2013). The leader and the employee arrive at a mutual understanding, a common interest, a shared space from where they might find more cooperative ways of working together to find adequate solutions to the problem. Again, it is the leader's perspective that is in focus in this study, and as such, it is the leader's experience of discovering new dimensions of the employee, and thus being able to relate in new ways, that is the predominant perspective in the data material. However, in the section below, the potential of more reciprocal, two-way dimensions of the leader-employee relationship will be discussed, still with the connectedness category as the main empirical focus.

6.3. Interdependence – an untapped potential of coaching leadership?

Mutuality seems, in this study, to be reflected as a unilateral process in which the leader asks questions and gains information from the employee, and this makes her better able to help the employee find her own solution, or make her commit to a predetermined solution. Bearing this in mind, it might be questioned whether the image of coaching leadership emanating from this study is one in which the mutuality, reciprocity and interdependent dimension of the leader-employee relationship is not fully realised. The theoretical framework in this study provides concepts that might lead to further exploration of the potential of more mutual, reciprocal ways of relating to one another in the leader-employee relationship. However, the following discussion is not an attempt to impose the theoretical perspectives on the empirical data, but rather to explore the border area of the data material in light of the theoretical concepts provided, and explore the possibilities of covering what might be considered a possible "missing link" in coaching leadership by searching for opportunities of more interdependent, mutual ways of relating to one another.

6.3.1. Transcending dependence and independence?

In relation to their previous leadership experience, some of the leaders in this study express that they have been used to rushing to conclusions, providing answers and instructing their employees. These are ways of being in the organisation and in the relationship that are believed to foster dependency (McCauley et al., 2008). It seems, however, that learning about coaching makes the leaders more attentive to the possibility of more independent ways of being in the relationship. For instance, in the case described by Adam, he discovers the opportunities that are to be found in taking a more facilitative role in the conversation, helping the employee find her own solutions rather than just proposing an answer. In such conversations, one might say that the employee and the leader transcend the dependence that might have been maintained if the leader had suggested an answer even if he did not have the preconditions to do so. As argued above, one might say that there is a mutual element in such a situation through the way in which the two parties in the relationship enrich each other with their competence: the leader contributes with her facilitative competence, which opens for a process of exploration and discovery for the employee, where her competence comes to the foreground. In this sense, they both contribute to the solution, although it is the employee who arrives at the conclusions with the help of the leader. In this sense it might be discussed whether they have reached a common solution or whether, in reality, the impetus for the employee's solution came from the leader's questions.

Kvalsund and Allgood (2008) argue that in many cases helping relationships come to an end when the helpee experiences independence and feels capable of finding her own solutions. In this instance, the transformational potential in more interdependent ways of relating is lost. Although dependency might not be as important a quality in a coaching relationship than in a therapeutic (Hart et al., 2001) or counselling relationship, which is the focus of Kvalsund and Allgood's (2008) discussion, it might be argued that the coaching logic is similar: the purpose of the coaching process is for the coach to nurture and stimulate the coachee's independence by being as neutral as possible. If the coach has an opinion about the issue in question, this remains hidden to the coachee. If the coachee walks out the door, having found her own solution, it is of no interest what the coach might think, feel and mean about the issue in question. This situation might be illustrative of an

understanding of coaching where the ideal is for the coachee to become as independent as possible. The solution found is organismic, it is owned by the coachee and found at an independent level from an inner locus of control. The goal is for the coachee to transcend her dependence on other persons, her outer locus of evaluation, and turn her gaze inwards to a more independent, self-directed way of being in the world (Rogers, 1959). This step into independence appears to be an important contribution of coaching in organisations and other arenas that might help people to establish contact with their own resources and capabilities.

However, it might be argued in relation to coaching leadership that both the dependence and the independence dimensions are individualistic, as they do not include interaction or dialogue. The relational space between the two parties where they might both influence and be influenced by each other (Buber, 1958/2000; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; Stelter, 2014) is not addressed. In the dependence dimension the focus is on the leader who is the expert who instructs the employee and in this way maintains the dependency in the relationship. Similarly, in the independence dimension, the focus shifts from the leader to the employee and the emphasis is on realising the potential and resources of the employee (Whitmore, 2011).

Might there then be a third alternative within the leader-employee relationship where the leader can be restored as an agent, and where her independence and individuality might be included in the relationship to the same degree as that of the employee? When the two parties have established a more independent way of relating to one another, is there any possibility that the leader's ideas, thoughts, beliefs and interests might be re-included in the relationship in such a way that the two can meet in a more reciprocal, interdependent dialogue? It has been argued that a true dialogue takes place when both parties in the relationship recognise and understand both sides of the relationship (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). Both parties feel influenced and enriched by the other person's otherness (Buber, 1958/2000, Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008). They both leave the encounter with something that was not in the mind of either person when they entered the conversation (Allan & Whybrow, 2008).

Stelter (2013) suggests that "third-generation coaching", which is more collaboratively and dialogically oriented than the preceding "generations", is better suited to explaining coaching leadership because in earlier orientations within the coaching domain the tendency of relapsing into the expert role was more apparent. It

seems that Stelter's (2013, 2014a, 2014b) project is exactly to establish a more dialogic, interdependent way of relating as the future path that coaching leadership should take. However, he contends that when issues directly relating to the production area arise, such as the resolving of specific tasks or discussions about work processes more generally, the leader is likely to relapse into the expert role. He therefore seems to promote more open, value-oriented discussions as the primary arena of coaching leadership. The question is whether there might be possibilities of transcending the dependence associated with the expert role and the independence that might seem characteristic of the more neutral, facilitative conversations in which the leader withdraws and refrains from sharing any of her experiences, reflections, opinions or interests, even when the conversation is directly linked to the work processes.

6.3.2. Self-interest as a dynamic, interactive concept

The concept of self-interest suggested by Stelter (2013) might here be seen as a more dynamic entity than what has been posited in earlier interpretations in this text. This concept illustrates the constraints and boundaries of coaching leadership. Once the leader experiences self-interest in the relationship, her possibility of taking a coaching approach in the conversation is impaired because the neutrality or openness in her role as a coach is at stake (Stelter, 2013). One question might be, however, whether there is any possibility that such self-interest on the part of the leader might be re-introduced in the coaching leadership context, but on different grounds than in the dependent interaction where the leader provides answers and solutions and instructs the employee in what to do. If the leader and the employee experience a more independent way of relating to each other, where the employee is allowed to explore her experience and might discover her resources to resolve her challenges and find her solutions, could it be that the leader might restore her self-interest by, for instance, making suggestions as to how a task might be resolved, or by expressing her ideas on how a process might unfold? Could the leader's self-interest be understood in relation to a dynamic field of interests emerging in the interaction and dialogue with, for instance, her employees?

Whitmore (2011) suggests that coaching leadership does not equal abdicated leadership in the sense that the leader withdraws from the organisational processes and becomes more or less invisible in the organisation. Such an image could be associated with the independent dimension as discussed above. On the contrary, in

coaching leadership the leader and the employee actively contribute to co-constructing the work processes and the organisation. One might believe that when the leader and the employee have established a more independent way of relating to and communicating with each other, a ground exists from where interdependence might arise. When both parties fundamentally acknowledge and accept each other as persons (Rogers, 2004/1961), as well as accept and recognise each other's competence, skills and qualities, it could be imagined that ideas and solutions might be discussed with a more open, exploratory attitude than in cases where the leader instructs the employee about what to do, a communication form that seems characteristic of a dependent way of relating to one another (Kvalsund, 1998; Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008; Macmurray, 1961/1999).

6.3.3. Can the employee also be curious about the leader?

In the findings from this study, a perspective on coaching leadership exists which might be seen as concurring with the position taken by Stelter (2013) above. Stelter suggests some kind of neutrality or openness of the leader as a prerequisite for coaching leadership. For instance, Neil is clear that in situations where he knows how he wants things to be, he cannot coach, but when he is not involved in the process of the coachee in terms of not having an agenda in the issue as a leader, when there is no "answer key" for the issue in question, then he can coach. This understanding seems to promote the independent quality of the relationship: the employee is helped through the facilitative approach of the leader to find her own ways or solutions.

However, a more common understanding posited in this study is that the applicability and usefulness of coaching in the leadership context is connected to the production domain. For instance, James expresses that until he found that he could use coaching to influence his employees to reach the goals of the organisation, he found coaching "useless". As such, the leaders in this study seem to have actualised more independent qualities in their leadership practice. By asking more questions and being more attentive to the employee, rather than being the expert who rushes to conclusions and provides solutions and answers to "everything and anything", as expressed by Andrew, it seems like more independency is fostered in the relationship. Carrie expresses that when she has conveyed information about "how things will be" she might explore the phenomenology of the situation (Tønnesvang et al., 2013) by asking her way into the employees' experience of the conveyed information and the

consequences it might entail. In such situations, is it possible that the leader's experience might as well be recognised as a part of the field and in this way reintroduced as a dimension of the relationship and process? Is there any possibility that the employee might ask her way into the leader's experience in the same way as the leader asks into the employee's experience? This appears to be an area for further exploration, both in practice and research.

In the following, discursive aspects of coaching leadership will be addressed and the quality of the leader-employee relationship will be explored as a central aspect of coaching leadership. This section takes a more overarching perspective on coaching leadership as a growing field, and all the categories in the data are in some way included in the discussion.

6.4. Coaching leadership – a one-size-fits-all solution?

Coaching has entered the scene as a skill, competence or activity that leaders are in many contexts expected to develop as part of their leader repertoire (Anderson, 2013; Anderson et al., 2009; David & Matu, 2013). The rapid, on-going societal changes in contemporary society require flexible organisations in which the willingness and capacity to change and develop has become a core quality (Graetz, 2000; Todnem By, 2005). An organisation's ability to change and develop depends on the leader's capacity to lead change processes, which again relates to the leader's ability to learn and develop (Ellinger, 1999). Employees on all levels must also be reminded that they are in a continuous development and learning mode (Åkerstrøm Andersen & Born, 2001). Since coaching is in its essence about learning and development (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kvalsund, 2005a; Stelter, 2014), it is reasonable to believe that coaching has emerged as a possible solution to the organisational challenge of our time, that is, the attempt to create organisations in which learning and development become an on-going integrated process (Graetz, 2000; Senge, 1990; Todnem By, 2005).

6.4.1. Coaching – a straitjacket for leaders in contemporary organisations?

The leaders in this study started at the coaching course with varying expectations and degree of commitment. Some of them were strongly encouraged to participate because their leaders had bought last minute places. Others had actively looked up this particular course in the myriad of coaching courses on the market. For some, it took time to see the relevance of the techniques and methods learned. However, during the time span of the course, the “*pieces fell into place*”, as expressed by James. At the time of the interview, all the leaders in the study were more or less enthusiastic about coaching leadership, although the way in which they used and integrated coaching as a part of their leadership practice differed on various points.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, a few of the leaders who were contacted with a request to participate in this study never responded to the enquiry. We could ask whether a reason for this might be that these leaders would have found coaching leadership inadequate or unreasonable as an approach to their leadership practice specifically, or to leadership in general. As also pointed out above, it was underscored and repeated in the information letter to all potential informants that all kinds of experience of coaching leadership would be of interest in this study. However, it could also be asked if the fact that I, as a researcher from a university, asked them to participate in a study of coaching leadership, according to their participation in a coaching course arranged in cooperation with a university, contributed to reinforcing what appears to have become a prevailing norm, which might be expressed as follows: *coaching leadership is good, it is something that leaders should show interest in and develop skills in relation to.*

If a leader did not feel enthusiastic about coaching leadership, it could be that she did not want to reveal this stance at the risk of appearing as uninterested, unwilling, authoritarian or old-fashioned – labels that could emerge as potential subject positions (Assarsson Aarsand, 2011) at least when located within the coaching leadership discourse. From this perspective, coaching leadership might seem like a form of governmentality (Foucault, 1991), an emerging technology and resource to be used in governing people in new ways.

In spite of its focus on searching for mutuality and interdependency (Kvalsund, 2005a), coaching leadership does not, according to the power perspective promoted by Foucault (1972), necessarily imply less power than even the most

autocratic leadership approach. Following from the assumption that power is an inevitable part of human relations and interaction, power does not leave the leader's office the moment, for example, that she chooses to replace an instructive approach with a coaching way of communicating. On the contrary, coaching leadership might be regarded as a new form of governance, a resource for governing people in certain ways (Assarsson Aarsand, 2011) in which one sort of power exercise is replaced by another. The question remains the same: it is not about who has the power *over* whom, but in what ways power is present and how it works in social relations and practices.

For instance, if a leader asks an employee: "*what do you think you should do?*" this does not imply that power is less present in the relationship than if she had instructed the employee about what to do. The employee might in such a case confirm the invitation by exploring her experience and opinion of what she should do, and thereby uphold and maintain the coaching discourse. Just like an employee might in a different discourse challenge a leader's directive and instructive approach, in a coaching leadership discourse, she might question and challenge the discourse by demanding an answer: "*You, the leader, must be able to answer to this, this is your task!*" This illustrates how power is a relational activity in which all implicated individuals participate (Assarsson Aarsand, 2011; Schnoor & Haslebo, 2007).

Foucault (1984) maintains that power "*is everywhere*" and "*comes from everywhere*" (p. 93). The coaching leadership discourse is maintained by the practices, relationships and activities relating to the discourse. If a leader did not want to participate in the coaching course, but participated anyway because of the risk of being perceived as old-fashioned, autocratic, stubborn or whatever other subjectivities that might arise in a coaching leadership discourse, she would still maintain this discourse just as much as a leader who uncritically accepts the norm and gladly becomes a coaching leader. In other words, if coaching has become a prevailing norm in the leadership context, it also emerges from and is reproduced within the community itself (Ahl, 2008; Sipos Zackrisson & Assarsson, 2008).

The 20 informants in this study seem to accept the coaching leadership discourse in different ways, and this might illustrate the strength of this norm in our time. Bearing this in mind, it might be critically asked whether the "possibility" exists to ignore coaching leadership in today's society? Can one be regarded a progressive, engaged, skilled and competent leader without being willing to at least participate in a

coaching course and try to integrate some of the associated techniques into one's leadership practice? Is there no more space for the authoritarian, instructional leader? If this is the case, is this exclusively positive or would then some of the diversity and abundance be lost? It might seem as though a leader who wants to fit into contemporary society and organisational life is more or less "forced" into a discourse in which learning, development, dialogue and mutuality are preferred leadership qualities (Anderson et al., 2009; Anderson, 2013; David & Matu, 2013).

Up to this point, a critical perspective on the coaching leadership discourse has been provided in terms of the leader. In the following, a similar critical perspective will guide the discussion of possible consequences of a coaching leadership discourse in terms of the employee.

6.4.2. What about Mr. Johnson, the blue-collar worker?

As mentioned above, coaching leadership has been associated with a "love discourse" (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013) that might be understood as a new kind of governmentality (Foucault, 1991). As indicated in the previous section, the leader and the employee are seemingly "forced" into a communication system where values such as love, care and personal development have become the prevailing norm (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013; Åkerstrøm Andersen & Born, 2001). Fogh Kirkeby (2008) refers to coaching leadership as an "intimate technology". The employee who is not willing to share her personal life with her leader might in such a discourse be constituted as the discursive subject (Sipos Zackrisson & Assarsson, 2008) of, for instance, a closed, reserved, peripheral and unwilling employee, just as it was argued above that the leader who does not show interest in developing a coaching leadership style might be constituted as old-fashioned or autocratic, among other possible subjectivities.

Åkerstrøm Andersen and Born (2001) show how the image of the ideal employee has changed from being a "responsibility-having" person who took instructions from above, to a "responsibility-taking" employee who is continuously willing to change and develop, and has a holistic perspective on the organisation and its needs. Furthermore, the authors show how, in Danish public-sector documents it is argued that if the public sector is to succeed, the employees' capacity to change and develop must be encouraged. It is argued that the security of the employee is in this perspective no longer connected to the opportunity to remain in one organisation

throughout life, which was seen as an ideal before the emergence of the postmodern organisation (Danielsen, Nordvik, & Saksvik, 2006).

Rather, the new form of “security” is the possibility that is offered to the employee in the organisation to enhance development and change. The logic behind this appears to be that if an employee is not offered the opportunity to develop within the organisation where she is employed, she will make herself redundant and irrelevant in an ever-changing job market (Åkerstrøm Andersen & Born, 2001). The “security” offered is, in other words, the opportunity to change and grow within the frames of the organisation. To put it more bluntly, the security against being regarded as not good enough as one is, is to be willing and able to undergo continuous change processes (Assarsson & Sipos Zackrisson, 2005). The question thus arises as to whether the possibility of developing and changing is not experienced as “security” for every employee in today’s labour market, and could it be that this “security” might as well be perceived as a straitjacket?

In the already mentioned comment in the Danish newspaper “Information” from 2 February, 2008, the author asks whether there is room for “*Mr. Johnson, the blue-collar worker who does his job and goes home*” (Thorup, 2008). She ironically concludes that there is still room for this typological employee, as long as he accepts being engaged in a process with a career coach. In other words, the concern is expressed as to whether the coaching leadership discourse might supersede any other ways of being in the organisation, both on the part of the leader and the employee.

In this instance, it might be asked: If coaching is about being attentive to the other person’s experience (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Kvalsund, 2005a), should not coaching be a way of becoming more attentive to the variety of needs and wishes in the organisation in such a way that “Mr Johnson” might also fit into an organisation where coaching becomes the prevailing norm (Assarsson Aarsand, 2011)? In what ways might coaching leadership avoid becoming a way of imposing a new set of values and assumptions on the employee – thus being associated with the “intimate technology” cautioned by Fogh Kirkeby (2008)? In the following, this issue will be explored in relation to the helping positions suggested in Chapter 3.

6.4.3. Who asks whom for help?

In some of the cases described by the leaders in this study, the coaching approach of the leader is instigated by a request from the employee. For instance, in the case described by Peter where an employee approaches him to talk about the task he does not want to perform, the private and personal information revealed by the employee about his life situation, characterised by a difficult breakup, does not emerge from the leader's need to reprimand the employee or have the employee help him solve organisational challenges. Rather, the employee's request calls for a coaching approach in terms of the leader asking questions into the employee's experience.

In light of the helping positions suggested above, such a situation in which the employee more or less explicitly asks the leader for help can be characterised as helping position 1. When the leader uses coaching as a way of responding to a helping request from the employee, could it be that the risk of "intimising" the leader-employee relationship decreases? In such a situation, both parties commit to the coaching endeavour, although not explicitly. For instance, in Peter's case, where the employee shared some of his experience, he responded to the "helping request" by repeatedly reassuring him that he was a resourceful, capable employee. This attitude might be associated with the unconditional positive regard and acceptance (Rogers, 1959, 1961/2004, 1980/1995) that is seen as a basic condition in the coaching process, as understood from an existential-humanistic point of view (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008).

This study suggests that by learning about coaching, leaders feel better prepared to perform their leadership practice when it comes, for instance, to being better able to follow up their employees. In one of the focus-group interviews Adam shares a case from his organisation where an employee left the organisation because no one was able to follow him up. One might imagine that some employees are eager to be coached because they want their leader to show interest in them as people, they want her to listen and facilitate their process of exploring their resources and capabilities. In such cases, this study indicates that by learning about coaching, leaders feel more able to handle such requests from their employees.

However, the data from this study also reflects coaching situations that have been initiated by the leaders. In an attempt to solve a problematic situation, the leader uses a coaching approach. He decides to explore the phenomenology of the situation

(Macmurray, 1961/1999; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013; Tønnesvang et al., 2013), the thoughts, emotions and reactions of the employee, by asking open-ended questions (Ivey et al., 1998; Kvalsund, 2006). Such a situation in which the leader asks the employee for help, in a broad sense, has been referred to in Chapter 2 as helping position 2. For instance, the narrative presented by Morris, in which he chooses to ask open questions instead of “decapitating” an employee whose behaviour he needs to change, can initially be understood as helping position 2. In this context, the leader needs help from the employee, in the sense that he needs him to change his behaviour. It might be argued, however, that eventually such a situation might shift and move into helping position 1 if by revealing information about private and personal challenges the employee is making a request for help to the leader.

On the one hand, one might argue that in this situation, once the leader and the employee are in helping position 1, similar challenges and dynamics emerge and unfold as in the situations described above, in which a helping request from the employee is the starting point of the conversation, and thus, helping position 1 is established from the outset. In these two situations the leader faces the same challenge, helping the employee in as respectful and ethically sound a way as possible (Anderson & Handelsman, 2010; Schein, 2009). However, it might be argued that the imperative to deal with the situation respectfully becomes even more important when the leader is the one who encourages personal sharing on the part of the employee (helping position 2). In other words, if a leader challenges an employee to open up and talk about the personal experience behind her maladaptive behaviour, whereupon the employee shares her experience and thus renders herself vulnerable, and then the leader is not able to receive this information and safeguard the employee by empathetically listening to her and doing her best to help the employee, this might be considered more unethical than not being able to intercept or respond to a more or less explicit helping request from an employee, when the leader has not asked for, or encouraged this situation. In the following, the question of how such situations might be ethically and respectfully dealt with by the leader will be addressed.

6.4.4. Asking questions – and being receptive to the answers

In the cases presented in the data material from this study, what the leaders express appears to suggest that they have been capable of receiving the information given by the employee in a respectful way, and of following up the employees by using their leader authority to make changes that proved to be constructive and successful. As such, these narratives might be expressions of mastery and self-confidence related to the use of coaching within their leadership. By using a coaching approach, understood as asking into the phenomenology of the *person* (Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999; Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013) behind the organisational *challenge*, it appears that they succeeded in both solving the problem on a systemic level and enhancing the relationship on a personal, phenomenological level (Tønnesvang et al., 2013).

One question arises, however, as to how such a situation might proceed if a leader is not capable of receiving such personal information, in the sense that the employee feels safeguarded throughout the process. What if, for instance, the question asked by the leader provokes an emotional response like crying, and the leader is not able to contain the crying because he feels discomfort? In such a case, the leader is not able to be congruent in the relationship (Rogers, 1961/2004). She is not capable of being in touch with her own experience whilst at the same time being attentive to the experience of the other person (Rogers, 1961/2004, 1980/1995; Thorne, 1991). What if the leader's discomfort makes her end the conversation without being able to respond to the emotions of the employee by, for instance, comforting, reassuring or just dwelling on the other person's feelings? Could the coaching approach, i.e. the questions asked into the phenomenology of the employee, in such a case damage the relationship in terms of a loss of trust?

In the terminology of Macmurray (1961/1999), one might say that in such a case the cycle of contact, withdrawal and return might be broken by the lack of responsiveness on the part of the leader. Because the leader is not able to contain the emotions of the employee and safeguard her in the process, the contact is broken, the employee and the leader withdraw from the relationship and there is no possibility for a return to the relationship, and thus no re-establishing of contact (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003; Kvalsund, 1998; Macmurray, 1961/1999). The leader is not able to attend to the needs of the employee in the situation, and withdrawal from the

relationship is a fact. If the two cannot return to each other and re-establish contact in the relationship, the internal relation (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003) is damaged and they are left with the external, formal relationship. The internal relationship ends, but the external relationship might continue, unless the situation is so damaging that the employee chooses to leave her position, or the other way around, the leader chooses to have her dismissed from her position. The two might physically meet and interact in formal and informal settings in the work context, but the contact has been broken and the internal relationship has ended (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2003).

This shows the impact and importance of relational skills and ethical sensitivity on the part of the coaching leader. These dimensions will be further addressed in the following.

6.4.5. The relationship: prerequisite or consequence of coaching leadership?

Throughout the various phases of his theory development Carl Rogers showed an unwavering belief in the fact that a relationship characterised by empathy, congruence and acceptance was a “necessary and sufficient” (Rogers, 1957) condition for therapeutic change to be achieved (Ivey et al., 2012). The relationship between the coach and the coachee has also been identified as a critical factor in coaching (Bluckert, 2005). Furthermore, it has been argued that if the leader wants to develop a coaching leadership style, “*the existence of a strong relationship enhances the prospect of success*” (McCarthy & Milner, 2013, p. 771).

Anderson (2013) found, in the aforementioned survey study of line managers that the relationship between the manager and the employee was a key factor in the managers’ likelihood to coach the employees. One of the variables in her study was the quality of the LMX: the “leader member exchange” (Anderson, 2013). LMX theory suggests that leaders are likely to give more attention and support to employees with whom they experience a high-quality relationship than to employees with whom they experience a low-quality relationship (Vidyarhi, Erdogan, Anand, Liden, & Chaundry, 2014). In such high-quality relationships leaders are believed to “*influence their followers through the unique, trust- and affect-based relationship that occurs between the two individuals*” (Vidyarhi et al., 2014, p. 468). Relationships with high LMX are characterised by meaningful emotional support and exchange, leading to mutual respect, trust and loyalty (Burns & Otte, 1999; Kang & Stewart, 2007; O’Donnell et al., 2012). Positive LMX is considered to influence employee

performance, and positive correlations have been found with job satisfaction, organisational engagement and creativity (Liao et al., 2010).

According to Anderson's (2013) findings, the higher the LMX, that is, the perceived quality of the leader-employee relationship, the more likely will the manager be to coach the employee in question. As mentioned above, these managers were selected from organisations that had shown interest in coaching (Anderson, 2013), and bearing this in mind, one might believe that the leaders in question had some degree of knowledge of and competence in coaching. This study might both support these findings and point in the opposite direction. Stories told in the data from this study reveal that the leaders use coaching in conversations with employees with whom they do not seem, at the outset, to experience trust and respect, which are characteristics of a positive LMX (Kang & Stewart, 2007; O'Donnell et al., 2012). For instance, in the example shared by Morris, he used coaching in a case where his earlier response would have been to "decapitate" the employee, that is, ask him to leave the organisation unless he changed his behaviour.

In relation to these findings, it may be asked whether the use of coaching might contribute to *enhancing* leader-employee relationships. At the same time, one could ask whether it might be the other way around, can coaching leadership contribute to impairing or aggravating the relationship between the leader and the employee? As argued in section 6.4.4 above, the leader's relational skills are considered to be an important quality of the coaching leader that helps to ensure that coaching does not become an activity that puts the leader-employee relationship at risk.

6.4.6. Is coaching leadership so ethically risky that one should let it be?

It has also been argued, in Chapter 3, that ethical sensibility is demanded of the coaching leader in order to avoid any ethical pitfalls or to resolve ethical dilemmas that might arise in the wake of the leaders' use of coaching, as seen in the extreme examples presented in section 3.6. The question remains, however, as to whether any risks associated with coaching leadership make coaching leadership in itself an unethical endeavour, or whether coaching leadership is ethically risky to the extent that leaders in practice should refrain from using coaching in their leadership so they can stay on ethically safe grounds?

When asked in one of the focus groups whether coaching leadership could be “risky”, Adam talked about a person who had left his organisation because he had not been supported or followed up, and concluded by saying: *“I think the risk that we are in very deep water, so to speak, and not able to get back to shore, is much less after we’ve learned more about this”*. It seems that, in comparison to the “risk” of not being able to see and follow up employees, it is worth running the ethical risks that might arise in the wake of becoming more attentive to one’s employees as a result of learning about coaching. This does not mean however, that the leader should be indifferent of the ethical challenges and pitfalls that might follow coaching leadership, but rather, such an ethical attentiveness and sensitivity (Anderson & Handelsman, 2010) is also considered an inherent part of coaching leadership: The coaching leader must be an ethically aware leader.

In this section, the coaching leadership discourse has been critically examined according to a more overarching perspective on the findings of the study, the impact of the leader-employee relationship has been emphasised and conclusive remarks have been given on the ethical dilemmas that have been discussed in several parts of the thesis. In the following, the last main category: the integral dimension of coaching leadership will be discussed.

6.5. An integral perspective on coaching leadership

An integrative dimension has emerged as a key part of the experience of coaching leadership in this study. An important aspect of this experience is how learning about coaching does not make leaders change their leadership completely, but rather they use coaching, to a large or small degree, as an integrated part of their leadership. Essentially, the leaders just start to ask more questions and listen more to a variety of leadership situations, and generally become more attentive to their employees, thus experiencing different degrees of change in their leadership. In the following, various aspects of the integrative experience of coaching leadership will be discussed.

6.5.1. Coachability and clarity

The tendency to bring coaching into all sorts of leadership contexts and situations has in this study been linked to the concept of coachability, which has emerged as an important construct in the analysis. Coachability is illustrative of the “navigational instrument” that helps leaders to judge a situation, context, relationship or culture as “coachable”. It sheds light on the leaders’ process of determining when to coach and when to use other approaches, such as instruction and the conveyance of norms, rules and regulations.

As shown in Chapter 3, the term coachability is connected to the noun coachable (wictionary.org) that has been developed into the concept of “coachable moments”, which Turner & McCarthy (2015) have researched through their study of factors that made leaders take advantage of coachable moments in leadership situations. The term coachability, however, has not to my knowledge been used in the coaching literature in the same way as it is applied in this thesis. Whereas a coachable moment is an opportunity to have a coaching conversation (Turner & McCarthy, 2015), coachability is an element, aspect or dimension of a situation that makes coaching seem appropriate, useful or applicable. Coachability might thus incorporate coachable moments: when a coachable moment arises, one might say that the coachability of the situation is high, strong or significant.

However, coachability might also be seen as a more overarching concept in that, for instance, a culture might be considered to have a low or high degree of coachability. As such, a culture with a high degree of coachability might be brimming with coachable moments, but might also contain moments that are not coachable. In this thesis, the concept of coachability is an experiential concept rather than a measuring instrument. For instance, when a leader reflects, in retrospect, on whether she could have coached in a given situation, she reflects on the coachability of the situation, not as an answer key, but rather coachability is illustrative of this process in itself: looking for the opportunity to coach in a relationship, conversation or situation.

The concept of coachability relates to the dynamics of using different approaches within the leadership context, such as the dynamic between clarity, on the one hand, and the ambiguity that could be associated with coaching leadership, on the other hand. For instance, O’Neill (2007) cautions that the coaching leader might be at risk of “downplaying” her role as leader by becoming unclear about performance

expectations and thus becoming generally more unclear and ambiguous. Locke (2003) argues that the leadership practice cannot be shared in every instance, but rather the leader must be at the helm and make decisions, although in dialogue with her employees and through democratic processes. This study indicates that when coaching is utilised and activated in the leader context, it is not at the expense of the leaders' propensity to, for instance, being clear about expectations and norms. It also shows that informal, unstructured coaching situations are a more conspicuous part of coaching leadership than structured coaching conversations. This finding will be discussed further in the following.

6.5.2. Informal, rather than structured coaching

Baker-Finch (2011) found in her interview study that leaders felt more comfortable about using coaching in structured conversations with their employees, for which they could prepare, than in informal situations. The findings of the present study point in the opposite direction: the informal area stands out as the primary context of coaching leadership. The way in which the leaders in this study search for the coachability of a wide range of situations within their leadership practice is a surprising finding. In the coaching course, coaching techniques are trained in triads, which, as mentioned above, means groups of three persons in which the role of the coach, the coachee and the observer are assumed by each person in the group in turns. These situations are more similar to so-called "sit-down sessions" (Anderson, 2013) than the informal coaching situations, labelled "coaching on the fly" (Johnson, 2011) among other terms (Turner & McCarthy, 2015). A plausible expectation might therefore have been that the leaders would primarily include such techniques in structured conversations with employees, as was the case with the leaders in Baker-Finch's (2011) study, because such conversations are similar to the training conditions in the coaching course.

One factor that might explain this finding is that none of the leaders in this study express that coaching is a direct overriding development strategy in their company. In some cases, the leaders have been encouraged to attend the coaching course by their superiors as a part of a leadership development plan, and in this sense, coaching is on the agenda, however, not to the extent that coaching is an integrated part of the organisational structure, procedure and culture. If, for instance, coaching conversations had been implemented into the structure in terms of an expectation of

annual coaching conversations with every employee as a part of the company's HR procedures, structured coaching conversations might have been a more important part of the experience of coaching leadership.

In her case study with managers who were considered excellent coaches by gatekeepers in the organisation, Talarico (2002) found that the managers' experience of becoming effective coaches was connected to the experience of both receiving and providing coaching, having coaching role models and experiencing an organisational expectation to coach. The present study does not directly support Talarico's (2002) findings. The leaders in this study experience support from their supervisors in terms of an appreciation of the decision to go to a coaching course and learn coaching skills, which in several cases is the leaders' own initiative. However, they do not experience an on-going expectation or follow-up as to whether they coach their employees or not, nor do they refer to any direct role modelling by their own leaders in relation to coaching. It could be that if the leaders in this study had experienced such role modelling by leaders and others in the organisation, along with an on-going expectation to coach, as the leaders in Talarico's (2002) study, structured coaching conversations would have been a more apparent part of coaching leadership as posited by the present research.

Another explanation of this finding might be that none of the leaders in this study describe organisations where every employee is explicitly made aware of how coaching is used as part of the organisational processes. Several of the leaders who were encouraged by their superiors to attend the coaching course say that they would not explicitly introduce the idea of coaching or communicate to their employees that they use coaching as a part of their leadership. For instance, in reflecting on his work culture, James states that he would not use the term coaching in conversations with his employees because he believes that they would think "*holy cow! That's dangerous!*" It seems, from James' account that the term coaching appears to be too distant from the everyday culture in his organisation, which he describes as "basic", a culture in which abstractions seem unfamiliar and unsettling. For instance, if he asks into the employees' opinions about the working climate, no one would say anything. However, James reflects in the interview about whether it is exactly in such a culture, where people's reflections and emotions tend to remain unspoken, that coaching might have a function in facilitating exploration of experience so that what is hidden might come to the surface. It seems that coaching is more likely to work in his

organisation if he coaches without explicitly expressing that this is what he is doing.

Bearing this in mind, one might imagine that if every employee was introduced to the coaching concept and coaching training was offered to all employees in the organisation, coaching would have become a more explicit part of the culture, perhaps to the extent that one might talk about a “coaching culture” (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005). In the following, the idea of a coaching culture as a prerequisite for coaching leadership will be discussed.

6.5.3. Can one swallow make a summer?

It has been suggested that to make coaching a sustainable way of working in an organisation, a culture that is supportive of coaching is required (Lindbom, 2007). A coaching culture is described as one in which: *“coaching is the predominant style of managing and working together, and where a commitment to grow the organisation is embedded in a parallel commitment to grow the people in the organisation”* (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005, p. 19). When everyone in the organisation is familiar with coaching in terms of knowledge and training, one might imagine that coaching becomes a way of working across the organisation, and that in principle, questions such as: *“do you want me to coach you on this issue?”* or *“can I ask you for some coaching about this?”* could be asked by anyone and to anyone in the organisation.

It has been argued that the leader should explicitly signal to her employees when she takes on a coaching role (Bresser, 2010; Hicks & McCracken, 2010). Furthermore, Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013) propose that the conditions of coaching leadership should be clarified in advance, in such terms as agreeing that private and self-developmental issues are not on the agenda in coaching conversations between the leader and the employee, and that the results of the coaching conversations are directly linked to and brought further into the work processes. However, the question *“do you want me to coach you?”* is virtually absent in this study, and as shown above, in many cases leaders find it most appropriate not to explicitly express that they are coaching. In such cases, clarifying the conditions of the coaching endeavour in advance does not seem to be an issue.

The image of coaching leadership which arises from this study does not seem to promote the idea of a coaching culture (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005), nor an organisational system in which coaching is implemented into structures and

procedures, as a prerequisite for coaching leadership. This leads one to ask: is the experience of coaching leadership as posited in this study sustainable? Is it possible to believe that the leaders in this study will still report five or ten years after the coaching course that they use coaching as part of their leadership? Can one swallow make a summer? Can a leader make coaching leadership a sustainable way of leading without explicit expectations from leaders (Talarico, 2002) and active support from peers and employees (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005; Lindbom, 2007)?

One might believe that the leaders in this study would not have experienced coaching leadership as an adequate way of leading, or as something which had influenced their leadership in positive ways, unless they experienced some kind of support, although not necessarily explicit, from both their leaders and the employees. As argued above, there seems to be a contemporary request for coaching leadership (Ellinger et al., 2014; McCarthy & Milner, 2013) in terms of an expectation for a leadership style that enhances learning and growth in the organisation (Ellinger, 1999). Furthermore, the activity of coaching is in its nature interactional and relational and cannot exist without the relational and procedural commitment of both a coach and a coachee (Kvalsund, 2005a). Although coaching is not necessarily explicitly addressed, supported or committed to in the organisations of the leaders in this study, the leaders are therefore likely to experience some degree of support from both employees and leaders if coaching leadership is to unfold and proceed over time.

However, there could be more potential in coaching leadership than what is expressed by the leaders in this study, for instance, in terms of the explicit use of coaching as a more structured communicative tool, which is not a conspicuous element in this study. The leaders in this study were interviewed in a time span that stretched from just a few weeks after the termination of the coaching course to one and a half years after the course, and all these leaders seem to experience coaching as an integrated part of their leadership. A suggestion for further research, when bearing this in mind, might be to carry out longitudinal, comparative studies in which leaders are interviewed several times over a number of years to explore the experienced sustainability of coaching leadership. In such studies, the impact of cultural and structural aspects on coaching leadership could be further explored.

In the following, it will be argued that the coaching-as-approach understanding of coaching is an adequate framework for underpinning the coaching leadership concept that is promoted by the findings of this study.

6.5.4. Coaching leadership – professional coaching or coaching-as-approach?

Since the informal coaching approach appears as the most predominant expression of coaching leadership in this research, the coaching-as-approach understanding (Roald, 2015) of coaching leadership presented in the introduction might be a more adequate framework for understanding coaching leadership than defining coaching leadership in terms of a professional helping relationship (Kvalsund, 2005a). As stated in the introduction, coaching might, in this respect, be seen as an approach that can be pursued in any situation and context, by anyone, rather than being connected to the *professional* coaching relationship and process (Kvalsund, 2005a). It has been proposed that in this understanding, the *coaching* leader might be juxtaposed with the *coaching* parent, priest or friend. As discussed in section 6.4.4 above, a coaching approach could have been understood as merely asking questions, but it is believed here that it also involves relational competence in terms of being able to be attentive to the other person (Moen & Kvalsund, 2008) and being capable of taking into consideration and letting oneself be influenced by the answers and responses to the questions one has asked (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008).

It might seem as though some of the theoretical and ethical discussions and reservations regarding coaching leadership have emerged from an understanding of coaching as a professional helping relationship, as also suggested by Molly-Søholm and Molly (2013). The tensions between being a coach and a leader seem apparent, and have been discussed at length in this thesis, particularly in Chapter 3. A coach is there to facilitate the process of personal exploration and discovery for the coachee, on her terms (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Alrø & Nilles, 2015; Joseph, 2014), whereas the leader is primarily there to lead the organisation as a whole – and thus also the employee – towards a common goal (Northouse, 2007). In this latter situation, it seems clear that the leader's responsibility in facing the employee is of a different nature than that of the coach, although there are similarities and points where they converge (McCarthy & Milner, 2013).

The problem arises, however, when the coaching concept is directly and uncritically transferred to the leadership context, as indicated by Molly-Søholm & Molly (2013). A leader cannot *merely* be a coach in terms of taking a coaching approach to any and all situations (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). It is also required of her that she, for instance, conveys information and makes decisions in given

situations (Locke, 2004). As argued by Locke (2004), leadership can be shared only to a certain degree – the leader must make decisions, even when these might go against the wishes and needs of individuals in the organisation.

On the other hand, a leader cannot be a coach *fully* either (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013), and therefore it is questioned whether the term “coach” is at all suitable when referring to coaching leadership. Should the coaching leader be called a coach, or simply a coaching leader? According to the findings from this study, the latter notion is believed to be the most appropriate, since it underlines the importance of holding a steady hand and emphasises that the two concepts should be viewed as different. As also argued earlier in this thesis, the assumption of a conceptual difference is what has led to the need to write an entire dedicated theoretical chapter on the theoretical understanding of *coaching* that underpins this study, and then to discuss and dispute the transferability of the concepts presented, in relation to the leadership context. However, the assumption that they are different does not imply that the two are understood as fixed entities that always manifest themselves in given, predictable ways. In practice, there are virtually infinite possible expressions of both the coach and the coaching leader. In this respect, a coach might be perceived as much less *coaching* than a coaching leader, for instance due to her lack of empathy (Roald, 2015).

By regarding coaching leadership from a coaching-as-approach perspective, it might be argued that the discussion of whether coaching leadership is theoretically possible becomes less predominant because coaching is then viewed as a pragmatic approach to certain leadership situations rather than being about the leader and the employee entering a coach-coachee relationship and fully assuming the roles of the professional coach and the coachee (Molly-Søholm, & Molly, 2013). The question of whether the leader walks into the room, the situation or the meeting as the coach or as the leader becomes, in this perspective, theoretically less relevant because it is recognised that the leader always “arrives” as the leader, but in this role, she uses coaching as one of her leadership approaches (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). However, again, this does not mean that the question of which approach is taken by the leader is irrelevant *in practice* because whether the coaching approach is useful, adequate or ethical in practice is a question that involves a variety of factors and depends on, for instance, cultural, interactional and relational aspects of the organisation.

Finally, it must be noted that in addition to being understood as an approach, according to the integral dimension of the findings of this study, coaching leadership is seen as a way of leading that involves looking for opportunities to take a coaching approach in a variety of situations (coachability), and thus becomes a framework within which one might interpret and understand one's leadership; a leadership form (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013).

Aspects of the integral experience of coaching leadership that have emerged as an important dimension of the experience of coaching leadership in this study, have been discussed here. In the next section, limitations of this study will be discussed, more suggestions for further research will be given and a discussion of possible implications will follow.

6.6. Limitations, strengths, implications and suggestions

This study evokes a relatively harmonious and idyllic image of coaching leadership, and thus joins, in a sense, the choir of voices in the coaching leadership literature that has been critiqued by some scholars (e.g. Anderson et al., 2009; Anderson, 2013; Herrera, 2010; Turner & McCarthy, 2015). I am referring here to the normative and anecdotal literature suggesting that if only the leader learns how to coach, a number of positive things are likely to happen. The promising idea of coaching leadership emerging from this research might be related to several limitations of the study. As mentioned several times, there is a possibility that the leaders who are particularly positive and confident about using coaching in their leadership have been the most eager to participate in the study.

Even though in the early contact with the informants it was pointed out that this research is not an evaluation of the coaching course, and that all nuances and shades of the experience of coaching leadership would be of interest, leaders who did not find the course or coaching *per se* beneficial or useful in their leadership might have refrained from participating in the study. A suggestion for further research might, according to this, be to look for leaders who express negative experiences with coaching leadership to more systematically explore limitations and boundaries of the coaching approach to leadership.

One of the strengths of this study is how an understanding of the core meaning of coaching leadership emerges from a heterogeneous group of leaders: a variety of organisational contexts, educational backgrounds and leadership experiences form the

backdrop for understanding the experience of coaching leadership. As such, this study indicates that coaching leadership might be experienced as an appropriate approach, both in knowledge-based organisations and production-oriented companies, both by leaders with high education and by leaders who do not have any formal education at all. Just as this can be regarded as a strength of the study, it can also be considered one of its weaknesses: the type of organisation plays a minor role and has been offered little attention here, just as have various dimensions of the type and level of leadership and the background of the leaders. A suggestion for further research could therefore be that such dialectics might be explored more systematically: for instance, does coaching leadership take on a different form in knowledge-based organisations than production-oriented companies? Do highly educated leaders experience coaching leadership differently from those without formal education?

Furthermore, in this study, few women are represented: only four of the 20 informants are women. Bearing this in mind, it might have been interesting to explore the experience of coaching leadership from a gender perspective. In a recent study, Ye et al. (2016) found that women coach more than men. The findings of the present study might, however, lead to the question of whether coaching is used and experienced in *different ways* by men and women. This could have been the point of departure for further research that might complement the findings of Ye et al. (2016).

It might be argued that the focus-group interviews that constitute a part of the data in this study have only been utilised to a limited degree. Due to the phenomenological nature of the study, discursive aspects of these conversations have not been addressed because the exchange of opinions and views is considered less applicable as phenomenological data than expressions of lived experience (Smith et al., 2009), such as examples and anecdotes (van Manen, 1997). A further exploration of how leaders express themselves in relation to coaching leadership and how the exchange of views might be understood in relation to the overarching coaching leadership discourse might be a suggestion for further investigation.

As argued above, the reciprocal, bilateral dimension of coaching leadership in terms of more mutual, dialogic and interdependent ways of relating to one another appears to be an untapped potential of coaching leadership, according to the findings in this study. A reason why this possibility of mutuality in the leader context is not fully actualised might be the relatively short duration of the coaching course. Can a ten-day course prepare leaders to become coaching leaders? In this study, this element

might be seen as a limitation, as well as a resource and a particular quality of the research because in many cases, a ten-day course is probably the maximum amount of time that leaders can, or would be willing to set aside for leadership development. Exploring and comparing the experience of coaching leadership as posited in this study with the experience of leaders who have gone through, for instance, a Master's degree program within coaching leadership might be a suggestion for further research. In such a study, the mutual, interdependent dimension of coaching leadership might be further explored.

Another reason why the interdependent potential seems unrealised in coaching leadership as it emanates from this study might be the lack of systematic, structured organisational support for coaching in the organisations in question. This is also, as argued above, believed to explain why the experience of using coaching primarily in informal, unstructured and implicit ways is more conspicuous than when using coaching in structured, planned "sit-down sessions" (Anderson, 2013). A suggestion for future research is then to carry out comparative and longitudinal studies that further explore the meaning and impact of a coaching culture, or a structurally embedded expectation to use coaching as a part of leadership.

Below, possible implications of this study will be discussed.

6.6.1. The contribution of this research

In the introduction, a brief review of the state-of-the art within coaching leadership research was given. It concluded that research has focused on studying the impact of coaching leadership on various organisational factors (Hagen, 2012). However, it was posited that there has been a shortage of research that has looked into the leader perspective on coaching leadership (Beattie et al., 2014; Gomez & Gunn, 2012). Merely by virtue of its emphasis on the leader perspective, this study therefore has the potential to contribute knowledge that might develop the field of coaching leadership. What is, then, the significance of the new knowledge created through this research? What do we learn about coaching leadership?

The findings of this study support the idea that coaching might respond to a need identified by leaders: that of developing relational competence (Rønning, 2013). Even though they worked in different types of organisation, the leaders in this study all seem to experience that learning about coaching and utilising this knowledge and competence in their leadership practice is in some way or another useful. Since

coaching is to a large degree concerned with relational competence, in terms of creating relationships that might foster growth and development (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011; Kvalsund, 2005a), the study underpins the idea that coaching leadership might respond to this reported need (Rønning, 2013). The present research thus suggests that developing coaching competence as a part of one's leadership might be an adequate way of moving forward for leaders, and coaching leadership might be a relevant path for further theoretical and practical development within the leadership field.

Furthermore, this research contributes to our understanding of the lived experience of leaders who use coaching in their workplace by promoting the informal arena as the primary arena for coaching leadership. In this sense, the findings challenge basic principles of coaching as proposed in the suggested literature reviewed in Chapter 2. For instance, when leaders in this study report that they use what they understand as coaching in order to make the employees do what they want them to do, it breaks with the principle of the self-directedness of the coachee: in coaching, it is the coachee who determines the goal and finds her ways of reaching this goal, a process that is facilitated by the coach (Alrø & Dauer Keller, 2011). Thus there is a gap between theory and practice: The leaders simply do not do what we, the scholars want them to do! Have the leaders, then, misunderstood what coaching leadership is? Or is it us, the researchers, who have misunderstood something? Are the informants in this study too inexperienced and thus not entitled to mean anything about coaching leadership? Who is to decide what coaching leadership is?

McCarthy and Milner (2013) maintain that contextual aspects that make coaching leadership different from what is here referred to as professional coaching, must be included and addressed in education programmes in coaching for leaders. Without evaluating the role and content of the coaching course that is actualised in this study, the question might be asked, in line with this perspective: does this research indicate that coaching courses must, to a larger degree, problematize the use of coaching in leadership contexts? On the other hand, it might as well be asked: Have we, the scholars who work with coaching leadership, misinterpreted it? Have the challenges of being a coaching leader been undermined in the theory development of coaching leadership?

Since the professional field of coaching emerges and develops in a dynamic interplay between practice, research and theory (Lane et al., 2014), this discrepancy

between theory and practice must be taken into consideration. Should, for instance, the situation where the leader coaches the employee to do what she wants her to do be rejected as something else than coaching leadership, such as, for instance, mentoring or guidance, or should it be included in the concept?

It is suggested, on the basis of the findings from the present study, that a future expression of coaching leadership might have a more cooperative, collaborative and dialogic form (Stelter, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). The leader and the employee might engage in more mutual relationships where coaching becomes part of more co-constructive and co-actualising processes in which interdependence and mutuality might take a more dual form: Instead of being the “invisible” leader who only facilitates the process of the other person, whether she has or has not any self-interest in relation to the issue in question, the coaching leader might, in such an expression of coaching leadership, promote a kind of mutuality where both persons can openly communicate their needs and self-interests and in this way underpin their independence in the relationship and be open to the other person’s needs and self-interest, as suggested in the theory of the transformative dialogue (Kvalsund & Allgood, 2008).

The present study indicates that if leaders start using coaching just a *little bit, or just a little bit more than they have actually done before*, in terms of becoming more attentive to one’s employees and one’s relationships with them, this might entail radical consequences for leaders. It makes leaders feel more confident about themselves in the role as leaders, and in meeting the leadership challenges they are facing. One might believe, however, that leaders could have felt *even better equipped* to meet such challenges if mutual and interdependent dimensions of coaching leadership were more fully realised.

Possible implications of the findings of this study have thus been examined here. In the final section of this thesis, some concluding remarks will be given.

6.7. When coaching flows into leadership

The metaphor of coaching “flowing into” leadership that has inspired the title of this thesis has been taken from the interview with Ida and is illustrative of the essential meaning of coaching leadership, as promoted by the findings in this study. This research indicates that coaching flows into all sorts of nooks and crannies of leadership: leaders bring coaching with them into any leadership situation, in terms of asking more questions, listening more and becoming more attentive to and aware of the employees and themselves and the relation between them. Bringing coaching into leadership involves using a new set of techniques in conversations and meetings in the leadership context, as well as bringing a coaching attitude into other life arenas, such as in the communication with one’s family. However, there are clear boundaries to coaching in the leadership context, and the border areas between coaching and other approaches which are still important parts of the leader repertoire are clarified through the concept of coachability. Leaders determine the coachability of situations, relations and contexts within their leadership practice and in relation to various factors which might call for alternative approaches.

Furthermore, this thesis shows how existential-humanistic perspectives on coaching are brought into the leadership context in that leaders become slightly more aware of and attentive to their employees and themselves in relation to one another, as a consequence of learning about and using coaching as part of their leadership. When experience is allowed to come to the foreground and to be explored in the encounter between the leader and the employee, leaders experience more cooperative, co-actualising (McCauley et al., 2008) relationships with their employees.

This study suggests that coaching leadership does not necessarily involve a complete change-over of leaders’ experiences of their leadership. Rather, coaching becomes a *slightly changed* way of being in the world. Leaders seem to become a *little bit* more attentive to themselves and their employees, and a *little bit* more focused on asking questions rather than providing solutions. They listen to the answers and the sharing of experiences that tends to follow from these questions. Coaching does not dispel, for instance, the leader’s responsibility for making decisions, or her clarity in conveying norms and, at times, giving instructions (Molly-Søholm & Molly, 2013). Rather, coaching becomes a way of checking one’s own and one’s employee’s relation to the issues in question.

Finally, this study indicates that there is still untapped potential in coaching leadership when it comes to realising interdependent qualities in the relationship between the leader and the employee. If such resources are actualised, one might imagine more cooperative, co-actualising, interdependent ways of working and being together in the organisation. This seems to be an area of further exploration, both in practice and research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Gestalt drawings

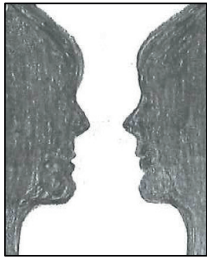


Figure A: Faces or vase?

The drawing in figure A is made by the author, freely after numerous variations of this drawing found on the internet and in many books. The figure is referred to as “Rubin’s vase” after the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin who formulated the principle of figure and ground (Sonne & Tønnesvang, 2013)



Figure B: Young or old lady?

Similarly to Figure A above, this drawing is made by the author, freely after variations of the same figure, found on the internet and in numerous books.

Appendix B: Information letter 1

Request to participate in the research project “Coaching leadership – “everybody” is talking about it, but what is it really”?

In connection with my Ph.D. studies at the Department of Adult Learning and Counselling, NTNU, I am working on a research project about coaching leadership. The purpose of the study is to explore leaders' experience of using competence from the coaching field in their practical everyday life as leaders. The aim is to describe a professional field which is highly prevalent in the practical area, but which is relatively young in terms of research.

The body of research on coaching more generally has, however, increased in scope in recent years, but few studies have gone in-depth into leaders' perspectives and experience in relation to coaching leadership. In my project, I am searching for leaders with personnel responsibility for five employees or more, who have been through or are in the middle of the coaching course arranged by (the name of the company).

Participation in the project will involve that I come to your workplace and conduct an interview lasting not more than two hours. The purpose of the interview is to gain knowledge on your experience of using the tools and ideas from the coaching field in your encounters with employees.

The project participants who are attending the course during spring 2013 will also be asked to take part in a focus-group interview in relation to module 2 of the course, where the group, led by the undersigned, will discuss experiences of applying coaching in everyday life.

This interview will have a timeframe of 1.5 hours.

One condition for participating in the project is that you have attempted to integrate coaching in your leadership practice, but your experience does not necessarily have to be positive, indeed, all types of experience are interesting to the project. The research interviews will contribute with important information to the development of the field of coaching leadership. My hope is that this will also benefit you personally by contributing to your reflection on your leadership practice and development as a leader, and that it may refresh your knowledge and experience connected to the coaching course.

The interviews will be recorded on an mp3 player and transferred directly to a password-protected server on my laptop when the interview has been completed and deleted from the recorder. The recordings will then be transcribed into text files that will be stored on the same password-protected server where all names will be made anonymous. Storage of all material will be strictly confidential, and all data material will be deleted when the project comes to an end, most probably the late fall of 2015 – all of which is in accordance with the Norwegian Data Protection Act. The project has been approved by the Norwegian ethics committee for social research (NSD: Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig

Datatjeneste). All names in the research report will be made anonymous and other information that could be used to identify informants, employees or workplaces will be changed. The findings from the study will thus be published so that no individual can be identified or recognised. All participants in the project will be given the opportunity to read through the research material before publication.

The project will be carried out by the undersigned under the guidance of Professor Ragnvald Kvalsund at the Department of Adult Learning and Counselling, NTNU (main supervisor) and Liselott Aarsand, Associate Professor at the same institution (second supervisor). Participation in the project is voluntary, and at any point in time before publication of the dissertation you may withdraw from the project and demand that any personal information that has been given is deleted from the study without giving any grounds for this. No one else besides the undersigned and the above-mentioned supervisors will have access to the information that could identify persons in the study.

If you work as a leader with personnel responsibility for five persons or more and are interested in participating in the project, you are encouraged to contact me by e-mail: gunhild.roald@svt.ntnu.no, or telephone: 41641021. Please also contact me if you have any questions or would like more information about the project.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards

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Appendix C: Information letter 2

Request for participation in the research project “Coaching leadership – as leaders see it”

In connection with my Ph.D. studies at the Department of Adult Learning and Counselling, NTNU, I am working on a research project about coaching leadership. The purpose of the study is to explore leaders' experience of using competence from the coaching field in their practical everyday life as leaders. The aim is to describe a professional field which is highly prevalent in the practical area, but which is relatively young in terms of research.

However, the body of research on coaching has increased in scope in recent years, but, nonetheless, few studies have studied in-depth the leaders' perspective and experience in relation to coaching leadership. In my project I am looking for leaders with personnel responsibility for at least one person, and who have attended, or are currently attending the coaching course provided by (the name of the company).

My intention is to explore the phenomenon coaching leadership through both individual interviews and focus-group interviews.

I am asking participants in the course (the name of the course) in August 2013, and who are leaders with personnel responsibility for at least one person, to agree to participate in a focus-group interview after the course activities on the 28th of August. The group will be led by the undersigned and will discuss experiences of applying coaching in their every-day practice as leaders. This interview will last up to 1.5 hours.

If you would rather contribute as an informant in individual interviews, or participate in both types of interviews, this will also be very interesting for me.

I would like to arrange a time when I can come to your workplace so we can have an interview of a maximum of two hours' duration. My aim with the interview is to acquire more knowledge about your experience of using tools and ideas from the coaching field in the encounter with your employees.

One condition for participating in the project is that you have attempted to integrate coaching in your leadership practice, but your experience does not necessarily have to be positive, indeed, all types of experience are interesting to the project. The research interviews will contribute with important information to the development of the field of coaching leadership. My hope is that this will also benefit you personally by contributing to your reflection on your leadership practice and development as a leader, and that it may refresh your knowledge and experience connected to the coaching course.

The interviews will be recorded on an mp3 player and transferred directly to a password-protected

server on my laptop when the interview has been completed and deleted from the recorder. The recordings will then be transcribed into text files that will be stored on the same password-protected server where all names will be made anonymous. Storage of all material will be strictly confidential, and all data material will be deleted when the project comes to an end, most probably the late fall of 2015 – all of which is in accordance with the Norwegian Data Protection Act. The project has been approved by the Norwegian ethics committee for social research (NSD: Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste). All names in the research report will be made anonymous and other information that could be used to identify informants, employees or workplaces will be changed. The findings from the study will thus be published so that no individual can be identified or recognised. All participants in the project will be given the opportunity to read through the research material before publication.

The project will be carried out by the undersigned under the guidance of Professor Ragnvald Kvalsund at the Department of Adult Learning and Counselling, NTNU (main supervisor) and Liselott Aarsand, Associate Professor at the same institution (second supervisor). Participation in the project is voluntary, and at any point in time before publication of the dissertation you may withdraw from the project and demand that any personal information that has been given is deleted from the study without giving any grounds for this. No one else besides the undersigned and the above-mentioned supervisors will have access to the information that could identify persons in the study.

If you work as a leader with personnel responsibility for five persons or more and are interested in participating in the project, you are encouraged to contact me by e-mail: gunhild.roald@svt.ntnu.no, or telephone: 41641021. Please also contact me if you have any questions or would like more information about the project.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards

Gunhild Marie Roald
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M: 004741641021

Appendix D: The informants

Informants in the individual interviews:

Pseudonym	Age (at the time of the interview)	Number of direct reports	Company: public/private	Company sector	Educational level	Leadership experience when starting at the coaching course	Time gap from termination of the course to the interview
Andrew	30--40	5 to 10	private	production and sale	bachelor	1 month	6 months
Peter	50--60	25 to 50	public	security	bachelor	19 years	7 months
Christian	50--60	5 to 10	private	construction	master	20 years	0 months
Henry	50--60	75 to 100	private	transport	Upper secondary school	3 years	10 months
James	40--50	50 to 75	private	transport	Upper secondary school	7 years	10 months
Terry	40--50	5 to 10	private	transport	Upper secondary school + courses	13 years	10 months
Easton	30--40	10 to 15	private	production	master	3 years	0 months
Ida	40--50	5 to 10	private	service	bachelor	22 years	1,5 years
Ralph	50--60	100 to 125	private	transport	Upper secondary school + courses	8 years	0 months
Larry	40--50	50 to 75	private	transport	Upper secondary school	15 years	1,5 years

Informants in focus group 1:

Pseudonym	Age (at the time of the interview)	Number of direct reports	Company: public/private	Company sector	Educational level	Leadership experience when starting at the coaching course	Time gap from termination of the course to the interview
Adam	40--50	10 to 15	private	service	master	10 years	during the course
Shaun	50--60	0 (recently 75)	private	transport	Upper secondary school + courses	12 years	during the course
Arthur	40--50	75 to 100	private	transport	Upper secondary school	10 years	during the course
Alice	40--50	5 to 10	public	public administration	bachelor	14 years	during the course
Thomas	40--50	10 to 15	private	service	bachelor	3 months	during the course
Frank	50--60	75 to 100	private	transport	lower secondary school	20 years	during the course

Informants in focus group 2:

Pseudonym	Age (at the time of the interview)	Number of direct reports	Company: public/private	Company sector	Educational level	Leadership experience when starting at the coaching course	Time gap from termination of the basic coaching course to the interview
Lynda	50--60	10 to 15	private	production and sale	bachelor	16 years	1 year
Roger	50--60	5 to 10	private	service	upper secondary school	14 years	1,5 years
Albert	50--60	0	public	security	bachelor	30 years	9 years
Barbara	40--50	0	private	production and sale	bachelor	1 year	1 year
Neil	50--60	0	public	education	bachelor + further education	15 years	2 years
Morris	40--50	10 to 15	private	transport	upper secondary school	9 years	1 year
Carrie	50--60	0 to 5	public	education	bachelor+ courses	20 years	3 months
Seth	50--60	0	public	security	bachelor	20 years	9 years
Elisabeth	50--60	0	private	HR	master	10 years	9 years
Oliver	40--50	0	public	care	bachelor	12 years	1,5 years

Appendix E: Interview guide individual interviews

1. Description of context/culture/structure

1. What kind of company are you working in? Public, private, size, structure, production.
2. What kind of role do you hold in relation to your employees, what are your work duties, areas of responsibility?
3. Could you please describe your everyday life at work/your work situation?
4. How would you describe the culture in your workplace?

2. Learning process

1. What was your motivation/the point of departure for your participation in the coaching course?
2. What is the most important thing you have learned from the coaching course (module 1, module 2, module 3)
3. Could you describe some eye-opening experiences/significant discoveries from the course?

3. Coaching leadership

1. How do you use coaching in your everyday life?
2. Which elements from coaching are you using the most? How? In which contexts?
3. Thinking of your different employee relationships:
 - a. In which leader-employee relationship (do not use names, only a description of the relationship in question) do you feel at your best as a leader?
 - b. Are you using coaching techniques/approaches in this relationship? In what ways?
 - c. In which leader-employee relationship (do not use names, only a description of the relationship in question) do you feel at your worst as a leader?
 - d. Are you using coaching techniques/approaches in this relationship? In what ways?
4. In relation to your employees (do not use names, only a description of the relationship in question) who is it easiest/most difficult to be a coaching leader for?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Could you describe the relationship between the two of you?
 - c. What effect does it have on you to be the leader of this person?
5. Can you remember having learned about techniques or approaches of which you do NOT see the utility of testing in your leader practice?
6. Have you experienced testing coaching – and experiencing that it did not work? Can you describe the situation?

4. Power and mutuality

1. You are in a role in which you are given certain formal power to make decisions which, to a great or small extent influence your employees' working life and everyday life. How do you experience having this power?
2. Can you describe an incident/situation in which you felt uncomfortable in having such power?
3. Can you describe a leader-employee relationship in which you experience that you, in spite of this informal power imbalance, are at "the same level"? (mutuality) Where this formal power aspect does not feel significant?
 - a. What characterises this relationship?
 - b. Are you using coaching in this relationship? How?

Appendix F: Interview guide focus-group interviews

1. What is your experience of using coaching in your everyday life as leaders, so far?
2. Which tools and techniques from the course have been the most useful for you as leaders?
3. Is there anything you learned in the course which you did not find useful to test? Something in the theory or from what you have tried in the triads? If so, why?
4. Is there anything of what you have learned which you have tried to use, but have not succeeded in using? What happened?

Appendix G: An example of an earlier structure of the analysis

