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Do I Really Not See Myself at All?

A qualitative study of how leaders in an academic leadership course are affected by the experience of receiving feedback

Master thesis in counselling

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate how leaders are affected by the experience of receiving feedback. I wanted to research which core elements arise when leaders with different backgrounds gain access to quality feedback from their colleagues.

The methodology adopted for this study is a qualitative approach. I have chosen a case study design, where feedback as a specific phenomenon within the case was researched. The case that was explored was a leadership course over three seminars. The leaders at the course were to complete a 360-degree feedback assessment, by using a tool called the Leadership Circle Profile. They were to receive feedback from different colleagues in addition to rating themselves.

For this thesis, the main source of data came from semi-structured interviews. Other sources were observations, videos, personal notes and reflective essays. In addition to this, the personal felt experience of the researcher served as an extra perspective. The overall goal with this approach was to look at the case from various different perspectives, and to discover something within myself in order to grow as an individual and become a better counsellor. I wanted to compare experiences of those who participated in this study, so I participated in several of the course assignments. This approach was inspired by heuristic inquiry as a research method.

The result of the analysis decided the choice of theory. The analysis resulted in descriptive, chronological categories that described the experience of feedback before, during and after it was received. The categories were: *the anxiousness of anticipation, the experience of receiving feedback* and *the results of receiving feedback.* The data shows that the experience of feedback had clear distinctions between the different phases of receiving feedback. The main themes from these categories were further discussed, and presented as *general remarks on feedback to leaders, the gap between how leaders view themselves and how others view them, feedback and emotions, feedback and leadership development* and *my heuristic perspective of receiving feedback*. It is challenging for leaders to view themselves as others view them. This gap between one's own and others' perspectives results in emotional reactions like surprise, disappointment, relief and shock. The extent of the reaction can relate to the level of self-awareness, previous experience with feedback or the content of the result. This new awareness is likely to result in adjusted behaviour, which can vary according to motivation, timing and personal goals.

Abstract in Norwegian

Hensikten med denne oppgaven har vært å undersøke hvordan ledere påvirkes av opplevelsen av å motta tilbakemeldinger. Jeg har ønsket å undersøke hvilke følelser som oppstår når ledere med ulik bakgrunn mottar konstruktive tilbakemeldinger fra sine ansatte og hvilke forandringer som gjøres på bakgrunn av dette.

Jeg benytter meg av kvalitativ forskningsmetode. Jeg valgte å utføre en case studie der tilbakemeldinger som fenomen ble undersøkt. Casen som jeg utforsket var et lederkurs som var fordelt over tre seminarer. Lederne som deltok på dette kurset skulle kartlegge tilbakemeldinger ved hjelp av et verktøy som kalles the Leadership Circle Profile. For å gjennomføre dette, måtte de svare på et elektronisk skjema og be om tilbakemeldinger fra forskjellige kollegaer i tillegg til å kartlegge seg selv.

Semistrukturerte intervjuer ble i hovedsak brukt som datagrunnlag, men observasjoner, audiovisuelt materiale, personlige notater og refleksjonstekster ble også brukt. I tillegg har min personlige opplevelse med det samme fenomenet blitt presentert. Målet med denne tilnærmingen var å undersøke opplevelsen av tilbakemeldinger fra mange ulike perspektiver, og å oppdage noe nytt ved meg selv. Jeg ønsket å sammenligne erfaringene og utvikle meg personlig som en kommende rådgiver. Jeg valgte derfor å delta i noen av kursaktivitetene. Denne tilnærmingen var inspirert av en heuristisk tilnærming.

Resultatet av analysen lå til grunn for valget av teori. Analysen munnet ut i deskriptive, kronologiske kategorier som beskriver opplevelsen av å motta tilbakemeldinger. Funnene viser at opplevelsen har klare skiller mellom fasene før, under og etter man har mottatt tilbakemeldingene. Hovedtemaene fra disse kategoriene ble så diskutert og presentert som *generelle bemerkninger ved tilbakemeldinger til ledere, spriket mellom hvordan ledere ser seg selv og hvordan andre ser dem, tilbakemeldinger og emosjoner, tilbakemeldinger og lederutvikling* og *min heuristiske tilnærming til å motta tilbakemeldinger*. Det er utfordrende å se seg selv gjennom andres øyne. Dette spriket mellom egne og andres oppfatninger resulterer i emosjonelle reaksjoner som overraskelse, skuffelse, lettelse og sjokk. Omfanget av reaksjonene kan relateres til nivå av selvbevissthet, tidligere erfaringer med tilbakemeldinger og innholdet i tilbakemeldingene som ble mottatt. De nye oppdagelsene sannsynliggjør justert atferd, som kan variere på bakgrunn av motivasjon, situasjon og personlige mål.

Foreword

This thesis would not have been what it is without the exceptional guidance and support from a number of people. First of all, I would like to thank my excellent supervisor Jonathan Reams for his guidance, support and patience. He deserves a round of applause for his critical, yet motivational comments that has guided me through this process. Jonathan, your ability to see me for who I am and see my potential, has really made this experience so much more encouraging and exciting than it would have been without you. You continued to surprise me throughout the process, and your quick responses and availability deserve an extra appreciation. You have answered my frustrated emails late Saturday nights, been available for sudden meetings at Dragvoll, and always shared of your own experience and competencies. Thank you for encouraging me to conduct this complex study and for helping me bring in my own experience to the thesis.

I wish to thank the people responsible for the leadership course I followed. Without you, I would not have been able to explore this phenomenon the way I did. Thank you for letting me participate in assignments and activities, and thank you for letting me research the case and the participants. Gabrielle, Uma, Peter and John have been excellent participants, always open with their perspectives, and making this thesis possible. Thank you for giving me insight into your own personal reflections and emotions. I would also like to thank my mother and dear friends Kine and Ester Elisabeth, for the constructive feedback and final proofreading of this master thesis.

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Contents

1 Introduction

In a constantly changing world, we are dependent on leading figures that can adapt and adjust their actions in order to improve their leadership skills and results. For improvement to happen, leaders need to understand how others view them, and this might not be the same view they have of themselves. They need to understand how they can progress, especially since they are responsible for setting directions for others. Studies show that performance levels enhance when feedback is expected, but the feedback is only effective if they listen actively and take the comments into account (Barner, 2011). Many leaders fail to see the importance of feedback, as it is common to dislike others commenting on a poor performance. At the same time, many subordinates fear giving feedback to their leader, as they believe it results in negative consequences for them (Ashford, 2013; Fisher & Campbell, 1979). As a result of this, feedback is likely to travel less frequently from a subordinate to a leader. Therefore, leaders should actively seek feedback on performance and behaviour in order to enhance organizational outcomes and develop (Ashford, 2013; Ashford & Tsui, 1991).

For this thesis, I have chosen to focus on how leaders experience receiving feedback. Feedback can be defined as delivered messages based on observed behaviour over time (Weitzel, 2007). My motivation for this topic is to better understand how leaders deal with feedback in ways that can lead to personal growth and improved self-awareness. As counsellors, we will likely engage in situations where we will need to facilitate feedback sessions. The ability to give and receive quality feedback is an essential part of being both a leader and a counsellor. In order to prepare for this, I wanted to research which emotions arise when anticipating and receiving feedback, as well as to see if feedback can have a developmental effect on leaders. I was granted the opportunity to follow a leadership development course this semester that included a 360-degree feedback assessment tool called The Leadership Circle Profile. Studies show that leadership development courses including feedback can have positive outcomes (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012; Reams & Reams, 2015). Based on this, I explored how feedback can affect leaders, and my research question became the following:

"How are leaders in an academic leadership course affected by the experience of receiving feedback?"

I also wanted to explore this in relation to my own experience. Personal experience with different counselling situations, exercises and theory is one of the most important tools in order to become a beneficial counsellor for clients (Kvalsund & Meyer, 2005). In addition to developing counselling skills, this personal experience can lead to a higher level of self-awareness (Brown, 2009; Clarkson & Cavicchia, 2014). In order to manage this, it is important for counsellors to engage in as many different aspects of the counselling practice as possible, in order to gain the felt experience needed to help others in a more constructive and empathic way (Kvalsund & Meyer, 2005). I have received much feedback myself as a volunteer leader without reflecting over the process that this could have started for me. It was not until I started my master program in counselling that I began to grasp the importance of feedback. Inspired by this, I wished to enhance my understanding of the felt experience of feedback by using a heuristic inquiry as a part of this study.

I will frequently refer to the term 'leader.' For this thesis I use this term to explain a working person responsible for a group of people. The leader can have responsibilities at any level, the important factor is the responsibility for progress and follow up of the individuals in the group. I would also like to point out that through my research I have found that the terms 'constructive' feedback and 'negative' feedback often are used to explain the same aspects. I have chosen to use the term 'constructive' for this thesis when referring to behaviour or work that can change or improve. The exception is when I cite sources that use the term 'negative.' As my focus for this thesis is feedback to leaders, I will only briefly mention implications when subordinates give feedback to their leaders. I hope this master thesis can be used as an inspiration for becoming and current leaders and counsellors, as well as any individual wishing to learn about the effects of feedback.

1.1 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into six different parts. As the theme for the thesis and research question have been presented, I find it natural to proceed to the theoretical framework for my thesis. Then the methodological choices for the thesis are described, encapsulating this qualitative case study and my heuristic approach. The fourth chapter concerns the presentation of the data. This consists of the informants' experience of receiving feedback through the leadership course and The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP). The main element of my thesis is the discussion, where I will look at my findings in light of the presented theories. This chapter also includes a part where I reflect on my own experience in relation to feedback, and compare it to the results from the data. I conclude this thesis with a summary, some comments, limitations and implications for further research. References and appendixes are presented in the end.

2 Theoretical Framework

This part of my thesis contains the theoretical framework I have found relevant for my research question. I have mostly used NTNU's library research system to retrieve research and literature that present different aspects of feedback to leaders, emotions, self-awareness and leadership development. All of the research I have used in this thesis is peer reviewed for quality assurance. The theories on effective feedback to leaders are presented to strengthen the thesis and provide some background for this theme. The remaining theories have been chosen based on the analysis of the data. The feedback assessment tool used for this case will be explained in this chapter. Since receiving feedback opens up for emotional reactions, it became natural for me to include a part about emotions related to receiving feedback. I will also present theories on self-awareness, as the participants and myself constantly referred to this term during the research process. It was natural for me to include some theoretical perspectives on leadership development, as this is a perceived outcome of receiving feedback.

2.1 Feedback to Leaders

Effective feedback is the ability to deliver messages based on observed behaviour over time (Weitzel, 2007). The goal of effective feedback is to understand what has been said, as well as the intentions for saying it. Motivation to begin, continue or stop certain behaviours can be a result of direct and specific feedback (S. Clark, 2013; Weitzel, 2007). According to Conlon (1980), it is the *content* of feedback that affects behaviours and beliefs, not the act of feedback alone. It is important that the leader tries to grasp the nature of the feedback in order for it to be effective. Listening actively, keeping eye contact and avoiding interrupting or paraphrasing the feedback are key measures. By learning this, leadership behaviour might be better directed to benefit the organization and the employees (Hacker, 2003). Studies show that satisfaction and well-being of subordinates has a significant correlation with how leaders adjust their behaviour towards them (Van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borrill, Stride, & Barling, 2004).

The result of feedback is especially effective if leaders are willing to open up for constructive feedback. This is because they often learn more about themselves and get the opportunity to improve (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). "The ability to give and receive negative feedback is paramount to a leader's success. It is a learned skill that takes practice" (Hacker, 2003, p. 77). Constructive feedback is also likely to receive more attention from those who receive it than positive feedback will (Hacker, 2003). Constructive feedback can make the leader more valuable to the company if it helps them change for the better (Levy, Cober, & Miller, 2002). On the other hand, it can cause tension and result in disagreeable leaders. In most cases a balance between constructive and positive feedback will be a better solution, as this makes leaders more effective and task oriented (Butler, Jaffee, & Feishman, 1974).

During stressful times, it is often strategic and easier for subordinates to engage in positive feedback to their leader in order to please. This is especially present if a business is suffering from a down period. Although this is a common strategy, it can result in further suffering for the business. Refraining from honest feedback can result in a leader continuing in the wrong direction, failing to grasp the reality of the situation (Kets de Vries, 1989).

> If leaders get too much uncritical admiration from their employees, they may begin to believe that they really are as perfect, intelligent, or powerful as others think. Effective leaders, however, know how to contain their excessive emotional reactions and avoid being caught up in groundless fears (Kets de Vries, 1989, p. 10).

A challenging aspect is that many subordinates fear telling the truth to their leader, because they are afraid of the consequences this might entail. The reasons could be insecurity, the wish to maintain a positive relationship or gaining strategically advantage. The consequences of this could be that they refrain from giving feedback or give false feedback to sustain a relationship or situation in favour of the subordinate (Selvik, 2005). Selvik points out that there are many leaders who shun the truth, and many subordinates are not willing to tell it. For feedback to work, it should be promoted and welcomed in a safe environment (Selvik, 2005).

2.2 Active Feedback Seeking

"Feedback is information made available to employees in their work environment, whereas feedback-seeking behaviours help employers to evaluate proactively whether their work has met performance standards and their behaviour is considered appropriate" (Lam, Peng, Wong, & Lau, 2015, p. 1). Studies show a significant correlation between leaders' job performance and feedback seeking behaviour, as the leaders are viewed as more open, successful and visionary than those who refrain from it (Lam et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2002). If quality feedback is gained, it is expected that leaders change work behaviour and more effectively reach goals, motivate and improve job performance (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Lam et al., 2015). This makes active feedback seeking an important tool of effectiveness. According to Kirkland and Manoogian (1998), it is suggested that leaders define and reflect on personal goals in advance of asking for feedback. In order to increase the possibility of discovering impressions and perspectives, a leader should seek honest feedback from as many inputs as possible (Hacker, 2003; Taylor, 2013). If the person giving feedback will benefit from the leader's improvement, the reason to give constructive feedback will increase. For the most effective statements, one should require feedback from colleagues who really understand how you work (Kirkland & Manoogian, 1998).

When it comes to receiving feedback, a big problem is that many leaders don't want to hear what others think of them, as it can feel like a personal attack or lack of competencies and qualifications (Ashford, 2013). A strategy for this can be to give leaders the tools needed to deal with feedback and make it more approachable. Examples are micro-feedback, which consist of short surveys that are frequently filled out throughout longer periods of time (Boyd, 2014) or feedback workshops, where a coach leads a facilitating process of dialogue between leaders and subordinates (Nieminen, Smerek, Kotrba, & Denison, 2013). Another example of a tool that can be used for receiving feedback is 'The Johari Window,' which is a personal mapping tool that seeks to let others present their perceptions of a person and then compare it to how the person sees themselves (Robertson, 2009).

The goal of these measures is to help individuals engage in regular, constructive feedback. After some time, it will hopefully make it easier to adjust to an environment where feedback is a natural part of the organisational development. If disagreements or other implications are caught at an early stage, it can prevent negative situations from escalating and becoming destructive for the organization and people involved. If feedback can become a natural process instead of the assumption that it is a personal attack on personal traits, it is more effective for collaboration and development (Ashford, 2013; Nieminen et al., 2013).

Tools to encourage active feedback seeking wish to assess the effect of internal communication for an individual and for larger groups. Hopefully they can help a person gain a greater awareness of their personality and let them see themselves as others see them (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). The tool used for this purpose in the leadership course where this case study took place, will be presented next.

2.3 The Leadership Circle Profile (360-degree feedback tool)

The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP) is a tool developed to support leaders in their journey of development (Anderson, 2006). Robert Anderson, the creator of this tool, designed a system for better understanding leaders' patterns of behaviour and the connection between actions and underlying assumptions (Anderson & Adams, 2016). This tool is designed to help leaders view themselves holistically by receiving feedback on their leadership behaviour from many different inputs. The leaders also rate themselves, and then they see it in relation to how their leaders, subordinates, peers and others have rated them. For the tool to be most effective, the leader should choose at least ten people to rate them.

It is important to help leaders gain insight into their own behaviour and potential, and the primary goal of this 360-feedback is to improve leadership skills and enhance leaders' self-perception and awareness (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997).

TLCP is a tool designed to increase leadership effectiveness in a more complete way than other traditional competency-based approaches (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Adams, 2016). This tool measures both competency and underlying assumptions in two primary leadership domains: creative competencies and reactive tendencies (Anderson & Adams, 2016). The creative competencies measure in what ways leaders achieve results, how they lead, self-develop and improve systems and organizations. This includes competencies such as awareness of self and system, interpersonal intelligence, relating skills and authenticity. Reactive tendencies on the other hand focuses on self-protection and self-limiting styles, where approval of others, protecting, complying or high control tactics are the main features. After gaining insight into these factors, the tool seeks to integrate this information and reveal opportunities for development (Anderson & Adams, 2016). An example of a TLCP report and an explanation of how to interpret it can be found in Appendix C.

2.3.1 360-Degree Feedback: Self-Other Ratings

"Seeing ourselves as others see us provides an opportunity for an accurate self-assessment and substantial self-development" (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997, p. 43). According to Yammarino and Atwater (1997), only around 10-15 percent of organizations use a 360-degree feedback to enhance developmental learning. Feedback from subordinates to the leader is even less common, as many companies and leaders continue to use feedback only as a way of letting their subordinates know where they are in the process of completing a task. "Those who never receive feedback will tend to retain inaccurate self-perceptions from others" (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997, p. 36). Self-ratings often suffer from unreliability and bias, and they tend to be inaccurate in comparison to ratings from others. When it comes to leaders, self-ratings are often higher than others' ratings of that person (Kets De Vries, Vrignaud, & Florent-Treacy, 2004). "In other words, we are not very good at evaluating ourselves or seeing ourselves as others see us" (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997, p. 37). When performing a self-rating or a rating of others, it involves looking at factors such as biographical characteristics, individual characteristics, job-relevant experiences, cognitive processes and the given context or situation. With this amount of factors influencing the overall view, it is easy to get different impressions of the same behaviour. This is not to say that the leaders' view of themselves is irrelevant, merely that "self-ratings and other ratings provide different perspectives on the same phenomena" (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997, p. 39).

Yammarino and Atwater (1997) describe four different self-and-other rating types: *over-estimators, in-agreement/good, in-agreement/poor and under-estimators*. Over-estimators produce self-ratings that are significantly higher than how others say they perceive them. This often leads to an ignorance of how they are viewed by others, and they tend to misdiagnose their strengths and weaknesses. Improved performance and adjusted self-evaluation is an effect of constant feedback to over-estimators. The in-agreement/good rating means that both the leader and the subordinates share similar satisfactory perceptions. They tend to be the most effective leaders, use feedback constructively and make effective job-relevant decisions. For the in-agreement/poor, both self-ratings and ratings from others are similar, but similarly low. This means that others recognize their weaknesses, and the leader agrees with their perception. They tend to be unsuccessful, have low self-esteem and take few actions to improve performance. For under-estimators, self-ratings are significantly lower than the ratings of others. This means that the leader is either modest or incapable of recognizing their own strengths and potential. They tend to make ineffective job-relevant decisions and underachieve (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997).

2.4 Self-Awareness as a Result of Feedback

In this study I found many connections between increased self-awareness and leadership development. The term self-awareness is frequently used in counselling literature, and there are several definitions and theories on the meaning. To define the meaning of 'self,' Plotkin (2008) states that "by self, I mean our personal wholeness, a totality that holds all the original capacities, potentials, and resources of our humanness" (Plotkin, 2008, p. 290). Brown (2009) presents the self as spiritual, and says that it exists individually and universally in the individual. Awareness can be defined as "the most basic experience of consciousness. It includes, but is not dependent on, perception, comprehension, analysis, and understanding. Awareness is considered to exist, even without sensory input; it is the apprehension of being," (Brown, 2009, p. 202). With this in mind, self-awareness can be seen as being present in one's own self and wholeness. This also relates to an evaluation of the self, as "self-awareness is an inwardly-focused evaluative process in which individuals make self/standard comparisons with the goal of better self-knowledge and improvement" (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012, p. 2). Jordan (2002, 2011) defines self-awareness as a way of turning attention towards one's internal processes, while Goleman (2014) points out that self-awareness is the ability to recognize and reflect on emotions, moods and drives, in addition to their effect on others. Taking this into account, self-awareness consists of both internal and external aspects, which includes awareness of oneself as an individual and the awareness of one's impact on others. This is also defined by Joiner and Josephs (2007), as they present self-awareness as the capability of understanding and giving attention to internal processes (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). The term self-awareness "refers to the quality of attention and reflection you bring to your own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours" (Joiner & Josephs, 2007, p. 37).

According to Hall (2004), self-awareness is a person's ability to observe and measure the self objectively and accurately. Self-awareness is an evaluative component, which refers to a person's perception and thoughts of themselves. Hall (2004) states that in order to improve leadership development, the leader must also focus on personal development. Increased self-awareness is one way of working actively with personal development, giving the leader the opportunity of understanding the connection between the different processes. Ashley and Reiter-Palmon (2012) present a summary of research that measure self-awareness in the context of leadership development. They state that self-awareness can lead to the need for self-regulation, as the individual gets signals that certain behaviours and emotions need moderation. This involves a recognition of internal and external standards and positive and negative attributes. This also leads to a desire for self-reflective thought and accurately detecting gaps in personal behaviours, traits and goal progress. Self-awareness includes self-evaluation of present progress, desired progress, and emotional impacts of increased self-awareness (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012).

Argyris and Schön (1980), present a theory of action that consists of two aspects, explained as espoused theory and theories-in-use. Espoused theory is the words used to communicate to others what we do, or what we would like others to think that we do. This is usually how people say they will behave under different circumstances. Theories-in-use consist of the behavior that is visible to others; what we actually do. Developing congruence between espoused theory and theories-in-use is a means for effectiveness and increased self-awareness (Argyris, 1980). Self-reflection and dialogue are key roles in order to connect and explore the gap between what is intended and what is done (Argyris, 1980; Argyris & Schön, 1978).

2.5 Feedback and Emotions

Many factors are present when an individual receives feedback, and the emotional impact of this can vary according to the individuals' mood, life situation, values and motivation. One's level of self-awareness, background and timing can also affect the way it is received (Buron & Mann, 2011). Considering the emotional impact feedback can have, constructive feedback can result in anger and defensive responses. According to a study on anger and emotional instability, a significant correlation between these two factors was found and it was especially clear if the emotionally unstable also possessed high power (Niemann, Wisse, Rus, Yperen, & Sassenberg, 2014). Refraining from receiving constructive feedback can at the same time lead to a disadvantage for the individual, as receiving only positive feedback can be counterproductive to learning new skills and reaching goals. Learning to control one's own emotions, grants the individual an opportunity to act on the constructive feedback. This can result in a more productive and intentional way of leading (Kopelman & Gewurz, 2013).

The impact and effect of emotions at any level can be a reactive trigger. Strong emotions can especially create a difficult situation for the individual, as it is often frustrating to try explaining or understanding the situation (Jordan, 2002). "When strong emotions arise in the organism, they fill out the person's field of awareness and completely dominate the experience, which among other things means that they take control over the person's will" (Jordan, 2002, p. 4). The emotional reactions that feedback can cause will often result in defence mechanisms like rejection, denial, anger or projection of one's own insecurities on the person that presented the feedback. "Emotional reactions may also limit the extent that leaders are willing to put themselves into positions where they will acquire experiences and where they may learn about their skills and deficit areas" (Nesbit, 2012, p. 213). From this, the possibility of constructive feedback can be a threat to one's self-esteem.

This can be avoided by engaging in a learning orientation, which means valuing self-development and "view errors and feedback as opportunities for learning which can aid them in redirecting and increasing effort" (Nesbit, 2012, p. 214). Feedback must be seen as useful and important, and learning to act on the feedback can create a feeling of safety when it is presented (Dahling, Chau, & O'Malley, 2012). Becoming aware of what triggers the emotional responses can give an individual insight into what has happened and the chance to reflect on it. Engaging in self-reflection is therefore a tool for managing the emotional impact of feedback (Nesbit, 2012). A way to start this reflection process is by evaluating personal goals and performance. If a leader learns to cope with constructive performance feedback it can also help them see themselves and their work from different perspectives.

According to Jordan (2002), self-awareness in relation to emotion can be categorized in three different phases. All the phases lead the individual to some form of reflection and awareness of the emotions. The first phase includes noticing the emotions that arise, as well as understanding the experience of their presence. Through reflection, the individual can also detach themselves from the emotion. During the second phase the individual evaluates the emotion, deciding whether it is valuable or destructive. This can lead the individual to conclude that there must be some changes made to the emotional state and choose to act intentionally in order to transform the different emotions. This transformation can help the individual move on to the third and final phase, where the goal is to transform the awareness and reflection into actions. This means that the individual will find constructive and systematic ways to deal with the emotions, and possibly adjust behaviour to increase emotional judgement (Jordan, 2002).

2.6 Feedback as a Tool for Leadership Development

Through the leadership course, the participants were supposed to use the feedback they received from the TLCP in order to develop as leaders. For this section I will therefore present theory on leadership development in relation to feedback. According to Day and Dragoni (2015), four key indicators are necessary in order to describe what leadership development is: leadership self-efficacy, self-awareness, leader identity and leadership knowledge, skills and competencies. If a leader works with these areas over time, it can lead to obtaining higher dynamic skills and higher levels of complex meaning making. It is within the complex meaning making structures and processes that leadership development is achieved, as development is a long term process, not a short term fix (Day & Dragoni, 2015). This long term process can begin with receiving continuous feedback (Ashford & Tsui, 1991).

There is much literature on leadership development, describing different stages, phases or transformations of leadership (Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Jordan, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). In order to develop as a leader, some alterations to one’s own behaviours are important, and feedback can help leaders see where these alterations should be. Many leaders fear this change, leading them to resist the process and engage in protective behaviour, projection, self-deception or defensiveness (Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Jordan, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Learning that they are viewed differently than what they think of themselves can result in feelings of weakness, embarrassment, loss of power and vulnerability (Reams & Reams, 2015). Loss of control can be disorienting for leaders, as many sense that strong leaders need to be invulnerable. Allowing for some vulnerability and letting go of the orientation of control will give more choices in their leadership (Reams & Reams, 2015).

According to Joiner and Josephs (2007), reaching a new level of leadership can only happen through reflective action. They state that action learning programs, feedback and coaching are the best ways to increase leadership development, as they can create an awareness of personal goals and an arena for assessing strengths and limitations. Feedback becomes a tool for helping the leader experiment with different behaviour and emotions (Joiner & Josephs, 2007).

This theory, in addition to the data I will present in chapter four, provides the foundation for the discussion later. Now I turn our attention to the methodological choices I have made in order to answer my research question.

3. Methodology - a Qualitative Approach

In this chapter I will describe the methods I have used in order to explore the experience of receiving feedback. I will present my methodological choices and the different strategies this thesis is inspired by. I will also explain and present how I have collected the data material, the analysing process, my role as a researcher and the ethical considerations I have taken into account while working with this thesis.

3.1 Choice of Research Strategies

"In fact, the choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out" (Silverman, 2011, p. 7). The purpose of this study is to find out and understand some of the experiences leaders have when they receive feedback. Since I wish to reveal personal experiences, I have chosen to use a qualitative research method, as qualitative research strategies aim to understand the individual processes (Thagaard, 2003). Qualitative methodology consists of accessing processes, meaning, gaining insight and understanding social phenomenon (Thagaard, 2003). "The main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena which are simply unavailable elsewhere" (Silverman, 2011, p. 17).

I want to better understand how leaders experience receiving feedback. I did this by following and observing a leadership course over one semester. To study this I needed to explore the personal experiences of the informants, where Wolcott (1999) applies the term *emic* perspective. At the same time, I also engaged in this study through my own experience, seeking to better understand what these leaders are going through. This can be described as an *etic* perspective (Wolcott, 1999). Through these perspectives, my intention for this study was to describe, understand and explore experiences through others' and my own perspectives. As I was able to attend this leadership course, I could gain access to observations, interviews, documents and personal experience over a longer period of time. I also had the advantage of getting to know the participants, as I talked to them and observed them in many settings at different times of their personal development.

Holding these considerations in mind, I have been inspired by a case study design with a heuristic perspective, where the interviews are the main source of data. I will therefore present these elements in the next part of my methodology chapter.

3.1.1 The Case Study Design

A case study attempts to build an in-depth understanding of a specific case or situation (Creswell, 1998). The case of this study is the felt experience of leaders receiving feedback within a leadership course. Creswell (1998) states that within qualitative research, a case study must consist of a bounded system, meaning that it is bounded by time and place. The leadership course I researched and participated in, consisted of three seminars over a period of four months. The course was held in different classrooms at the university.

The leadership course focused on several different topics that are relevant for leadership development. Since my research question covers the experience of leaders receiving feedback, I focused on the course's parts that specifically related to this. My main focus for this thesis was the practical feedback exercises the participants engaged in. My case is therefore an embedded case, which means that I only studied chosen parts of a case rather than the entire case material. Since I chose feedback as a theme in advance of the course, this approach can relate to an instrumental case study, and the case becomes the road to better understand the issue at hand (Creswell, 1998).

Case studies often focus on a problem, the context of the case, the issues at hand and the lessons learnt. For my case, the problem is my research question and the context is the content and processes from the leadership course. The issues will be presented through my data material and analysis, and the lessons learnt will be presented in the discussion and conclusion, including my self-reflection on the matter. Although there is no standard way of reporting or presenting a case study research, Creswell (1998) states that a detailed description of the case and the issues probed further must be present.

In a case study, multiple and extensive sources of information are gathered (Creswell, 1998). In my case I used observations, interviews, documents and audio-visual material in order to collect the data material. It is important to point out that all the research participants and myself had completed the TLCP 360-degree feedback assessment tool that was presented in the previous chapter. We also received a debriefing session about our results with a qualified coach. The experience from this tool is my main source for the data material. In addition to this, the participants completed a self-made video which was intended to reveal something they had learned about themselves by receiving feedback through the TLCP. They were to present an area where they wished to develop as leaders. After the course was finished, they also completed a reflective essay that they needed to hand in for their course exam. For this research project, I gained access to four of the video files and three of the reflective essays.

3.1.2 Heuristic Inquiry- Me as a Researcher

In addition to completing the TLCP, I participated in some of the activities during the leadership course myself, hoping to personally understand what the leaders were going through. This way, my own experience is a part of this research study, and will serve as an extra perspective in the discussion chapter. I hoped that this approach could strengthen my felt experience of the challenges of receiving feedback in addition to strengthening this case study. As I have worked as a student leader for three years, I could relate to many of the challenges and assignments that were presented during the leadership course. I was therefore inspired by how heuristic inquiry enabled me to use and integrate my own experience as a means to create a story grasping an essence of unique experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

As many other inquiries, heuristic inquiry begins with a concept or a question where a researcher seeks an answer, in order to discover and experience (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristics lies between understanding and explanation, idea and form and phenomenon and person (Leahy, 2001). It focuses on the researcher's experience, and that it is either comparable or equivalent to the experience of the case, informants or situation that is being researched. For me this will mainly include my experience with the feedback from the TLCP and the debrief I received. Moustakas (1990) explains heuristic inquiry as:

> A process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. (p. 9)

The word 'heuristic' means to discover or find something, and key words to describe heuristic inquiry are knowledge, self-awareness, self-discovery, meaning and inspiration (Moustakas, 1990). These elements have also had much focus throughout my master degree in counselling. We have been taught about the importance of self-awareness, involvement and felt experience, which evidently inspired me to choose this approach. Through my master degree and this leadership course, I have been highly personally involved, which Moustakas (1990) refers to as the core of heuristics. I have been involved as both a participant and a researcher, and the experience of receiving feedback on my own leadership behaviour has led to unique discoveries. "Emphasis on the investigator's internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 12). Heuristic inquiry sees the researcher's thoughts and pre-understanding as being just as valid as the informants', and the goal is to create a story that can grasp an essence of unique experiences. Self-understanding as well as personal growth will occur simultaneously. This is not something I will present in the analysis or the empirical findings, as I wished to keep an objective role as a researcher when talking to my informants. I did this to avoid affecting their judgements and answers. I will bring in my personal experience during the discussion of this thesis. Although I tried my best not to manipulate the data, I have brought in my pre-understanding as a volunteer student leader as well as a counselling student. Keeping the clear distinction between myself as a researcher and a participant in the leadership course has been challenging, so a more objective way of solving this would have been to conduct this research study without the heuristic approach. However, as I wished to explore the element of experience, I decided that this involvement would benefit this study.

3.2 Research Site and Participants

Through my supervisor, I was introduced to this leadership course that consisted of three seminars over a total of five days spread over four months. At this course, around twenty leaders or becoming leaders participated. Their backgrounds varied, but they all worked at different companies or organizations in Norway. The aim of this course was to help leaders develop, and integrate that with learning about relevant leadership theory. The TLCP feedback tool was a means to that end, and would hopefully help the participants master their jobs and roles more efficiently later. The course was very interactive, forcing them to participate in discussions, activities, exercises and assignments. In addition to the course leaders and myself, there were other coaches and assistants involved during some of the seminars. The group of participants remained the same throughout the entire course, giving them a chance to get to know each other and learn from one another.

On the 1st seminar, the participants met with the course leader, introduced themselves and were oriented about the course's structure, curriculum, assignments and the exam. The first assignment was to complete the TLCP and they needed to get colleagues, leaders, subordinates and other acquaintances to fill in this extensive survey on how they perceive them as a leader. At this time, I also notified them about my presence. Although I was not going to gather any data at this moment, I wanted them to know of my intentions and my project, as well as ask them for their informed consent. At this point I also mentioned that I hoped some of them would be willing to participate in more extensive observations and interviews at a later time.

At the 2nd seminar, which lasted two days, they received their TLCP report with the results on how they were viewed as a leader. In addition to this, they were all offered a debriefing session with a coach who would focus on their results from the report. The coaches that were present this day were all familiar with the tool and had performed similar coaching sessions earlier. I observed four participants during their debriefing sessions, and heard the feedback they received from the coach, their reactions and their reflections over the results. After I had observed the participants, I also received my own report and a debriefing session that was similar to the one the research participants had been through.

The 3rd seminar focused on several different topics, but relevant for this thesis was a personal video presentation from each of the participants. They had all received an assignment that they would present in a short video. They were to creatively show their experience of taking their feedback and insights back into the workplace and see what happened when they explored that part of themselves. The goal of this assignment was to help them understand some of their personal challenges, and give them an opportunity to work on this. After they showed the videos in smaller groups, they received feedback from the others and also reflected on how it felt to receive this feedback. I did not complete the video assignment myself, but decided to be an observer during the presentations.

My criteria for choosing research participants were that they were attending this leadership course and would participate in all the assignments and activities. My choice of research participants was mainly a practical one, chosen during the 2nd seminar. All the participants were to receive personal debriefing sessions one at a time, and there were six different coaches who held them. Because these sessions were held simultaneously and at a varying pace, it was impossible to choose my research participants freely. After talking to my supervisor and one of the coaches, I was encouraged to observe this coach's four participants if they gave me their informed consent. They all wanted to be a part of my project, and agreed to let me observe their debriefs. This made it practical and possible to observe four participants, and the sample became different leaders from the course without the bias of me choosing myself. According to Postholm (2010), a sample of three informants is sufficient to find some common ground in qualitative research. In my study I chose to have four, in case someone would withdraw their informed consent or fail to contribute with input that I could use. These four consisted of two men and two women with different leadership backgrounds. They were all from Norway, therefore the coaching session and the interviews were held in Norwegian, although the course was in English. The participants' age and background will be anonymised, I will therefore just refer to the fictional names Gabrielle, Uma, Peter and John.

3.3 Strategies for the Data Collection

According to Creswell (1998), the four basic types of collecting information in a qualitative research study is through interviews, observations, documents and audio-visual materials. In this study, I gained access to pieces of information from observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective essays and a short self-made video. In my case study, I have used the information from the interviews as my main source of data, making the others more supporting and supplementary methods. By this I mean that the observations and the video assignment were mostly used in order to strengthen the interviews. The reflective essays were used as a validation of the results I found. By reading about how the participants evaluated their own experience, I could compare my analysis to their view. The array of methods used are in many ways a strength of this study, as I had many forms of data collection. I was able to observe traits, and ask about them during the interviews. I was also able to observe them receive feedback in the heat of the moment, and talk to them about that experience after they had reflected on it. It is important to acknowledge that this choice also created many challenges, and it was difficult to organize the data and complicated to analyse. I will elaborate these challenges in the analysis section.

Being a participant observer helps us be in the world with our informants. Participating yourself can help you to understand the world first hand, rather than eyeing it from a distance (Silverman, 2011). Since I participated in a course that included lunch breaks and dinners, I was conscious of separating when I was collecting data and when I was only engaging in small talk with the participants. I mentioned my role as a researcher continuously throughout the course in order to remind my research participants of the project. I also told them when I was observing and gathering data for the project, and when I was just participating. At the end of the course, I sent a reminding email to the participants where I also pointed out that they at any time could withdraw their participation.

An important factor for me was to separate my observations from my interpretations at an early level, in order to grasp what was actually going on during the course. If I made some interpretations or analyses right after an observation, I clearly marked it with an ‘A’. During the observations I also coded my participants with numbers from 1-4. When I observed reactions, I wrote ‘R’, and when I wrote down direct quotes that they said I marked it as ‘DS’. All notes concerning reflections, feedback and self-assessment of the personal videos were marked with ‘V’, but the notes I made that described the content of the different videos they showed were marked ‘DV.’ Personal notes or comments were marked ‘PN.’ This way I created a structural way of keeping track of all the different data I gathered.

The main research material was gathered through the interviews I had with the participants after the leadership course. This consisted of four semi-structured interviews that lasted between fifty minutes and one and a half hour. The interview can be viewed as a form of conversation, as it is through words we get the opportunity to tap into stories, feelings and interpretations. This is exactly what I wanted to look at with this thesis. The interview means to reveal something subjective (Ryen, 2012), and I wished to grasp leaders' subjective experience. This grants an opportunity to explore different themes and perspectives, presenting us with something real and natural (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). I recorded all my interviews on a recorder, and later I transcribed the interviews in order to analyse them and use direct quotes from my participants.

A proper interview guide is essential in order to gather the needed information, as this structures the conversation and ensures that you cover the prepared topics (Ryen, 2012). I started working on my interview guide after I had finished most of the observations, which was after the first two seminars. This way I had a better perspective of what the course had contained, and how I could structure my questions. With help from my supervisor, I created an interview guide that focused on the emotions and experiences connected to receiving feedback. As well, each interview contained three to four personal questions based on my observations of them during their debriefing session and the course. This was to help them remember what they had done or said at the time, and enable them to elaborate and reflect on what they had meant. My first draft of the interview guide consisted of too many questions, so it left little room for new discoveries. I ended up removing half of the questions in my original guide. This gave me the opportunity to add personal questions for each participant, focusing more on their direct experience. The final guide consisted of ten main questions, with sub questions to be asked if the participant did not automatically answer this already. See Appendix A for an English version of the guide, and Appendix B for the guide in Norwegian. I did not wish to follow the interview guide too strictly, as I was open for new discoveries throughout the interview. At the same time this guide helped me stay on track and gather the main points that I needed in order to dig deeper into my research question (Postholm, 2010).

According to Thagaard (2003), the participants can change their meaning about an experience at a later moment. This means that during an interview, there is a chance that their answers are affected by the understanding they have gained after a reflection process. This was one of my main reasons for presenting objective data from my observations and ask them about it during the interview. At times this reminded them of their initial reactions and feelings, and it worked as a remembering strategy. I asked them about different aspects of the debrief sessions, reactions and statements during class and their presentation of the short video they made. I had an amazing experience with this approach, as many of the participants had forgotten some of the aspects that had happened earlier. Just by mentioning a comment they had said or retelling a bodily expression, opened them up for deeper reflections. This way, my observations helped me go deeper into the interviews, and gain access to information that would not have presented if it were not for my observations.

Even though I see this as an advantage, it is important to acknowledge that when I asked them about previous situations, their answers could be affected by the content of my question. It can be discussed if it is at all possible to enter the informants' world in order to grasp subjective experiences. There is the possibility that the researcher can provoke the informant to answer a preconceived assertion, confirming own assumptions (Dingwall, 1997). This was especially a challenge for me, as I had already observed them and participated in the activity myself. In order to try avoiding this, I therefore strictly asked them the open questions first, and let them speak freely to avoid manipulating their answers. When I later added own observations, I chose to simply retell exactly what I saw or heard, without analysing or trying to create meaning at this moment.

As Dingwall (1997) states, the participants can easily become a confirmation strategy for the researcher, especially if the researcher has made up his or her mind in advance. Since the interviewer and the interviewee construct data together, it can be debated if this is representative for reality. Another implication I tried to prevent is that the informants can be stressed by the situations and answer what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Eide & Skorstad, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). I was aware that my observations could stress them in order to think that they had meant something else with the information. In order to avoid this, I tried my best to create a safe environment for the interview, meeting them at a place of their choice, and getting to know them in advance. I also told them that the observations were just to understand the situation better, and that their personal experience is the main feature for this project.

3.4 Analysis of Data

There is no standard approach to analysing qualitative data, as each qualitative study is seen as unique and should be analysed to best answer the research question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Postholm, 2010). To help me start the analysing process, I used elements from The Constant Comparative Method seen in grounded theory, as I created themes and categories directly from the data, and not from the existing theory or own perceptions prior to this process (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, I have not developed new theory, so it cannot be directly compared to the stages used in grounded theory. My intention was to grasp the experience of feedback, focusing on themes and patterns, and I will discuss my findings by using existing theory rather that creating my own.

After I had gathered all the data material, I ended up with 34 pages of transcribed interviews, 18 pages of observational notes and 13 pages of personal notes and thoughts. The observational notes were first written on paper, and then written on my computer. Already on paper I had drawn lines between similar observations, and linked certain aspects from the course. I marked this with symbols and footnotes in the material to keep track of my initial thoughts.

To get an overall impression of my data, I read through all my notes and interview transcriptions several times. I started analysing my data one line at a time, underlining interesting quotations and words. After this I tried to develop some categories from the material. Finally, I looked for themes and ways to structure my material in a way that could be presented and understood. I used this as a guideline to find themes, which later helped me create nodes with Nvivo, which is the computer software that I chose to use.

I used Nvivo for further analysis of the text documents, interview transcriptions, observation notes and personal reflections. Through Nvivo, I selected and imported the different files that I wished to analyse, and created several projects in the program. Because I could create many projects at the same time, it became much easier for me to categorize the data material. From this I created something called nodes, which helped me access and link together elements from the different documents. When I accessed my nodes, and later sub-nodes, I could find the original document and also find the specific part of the document that I used for that node. For me this was a great way to systemize and structure my data material, as I could easily find back to all my sources and insert personal comments along the way. Through observations, interviews, notes and other material my amount of documents was quite large, and Nvivo helped to organize all this data. When all my documents were gathered in one place, it became more approachable to find categories and themes. One example of a function I frequently used Nvivo for is word frequency. This shows which words are used repeatedly throughout the documents I chose to look at, and it helped me seek out some key words and themes for this thesis.

In order to find categories and themes, I chose once again to read through my documents one paragraph at the time. This time I created a node for each interpretation when I found several themes or topics in the paragraph. Many times I was uncertain if the parts I read through would have any direct relevance or not, but I created a node in case it would be something I could use later. At all times I held my research question in mind, in order to focus on what I was really looking for. I ended up with a total of 40 different nodes.

As a researcher I was open to new meaning throughout the process, and took my time really listening to what the data presented. During the analysing process I looked at different ways the material could be categorized. This included writing down categories top of mind and using Nvivo to explore different ways of creating nodes, like using the word frequency tool in order to see repeated patters and find categories. I organized these categories into different themes that will be presented in chapter five. The final categories and themes I have decided to present in the next chapters stuck out because of frequency, relevance to my research question and focus areas for the participants (Thagaard, 2003). Because of this thesis' length I had to integrate some nodes into larger themes, and some nodes were set aside from deeper analysis, as there is not enough time and space to analyse all of them. These categories or themes had either limited data or lacked direct relevance for my research question. An example here is that I observed many interesting aspects connected to organizational change, and the leaders' thoughts on how they can lead change. Although this was a frequent topic, it lacks a direct link to my thesis question, and I decided to leave it out of the final results.

The final nodes led me to see patterns in my material, helping me to frame the categories in a linear way, as the data material naturally changed from which phase the participants were engaged in. This could also help me to make distinctions between the different levels of receiving feedback, and find common ground. Further descriptions of these categories as a timeline will be described and presented in the next chapter.

3.5 Study Quality

In order to evaluate the aspect of my study quality, I will present the concepts of validity and reliability. Validity in qualitative research relates to the credibility of the researcher's findings and the interpretation of data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Thagaard, 2003). To strengthen this study's validity, I have explained each aspect of the case, and accounted for the procedures for my data collection strategies, the data and the analysing process. I also benefitted from member checks, where I let my participants read through their quotes and my interpretations of the material. This was to secure if they recognized themselves, their statements, and could agree on or understand the interpretation. This was also to avoid that the participants would read my thesis and find it painful that they could not recognize themselves. Informants feeling misunderstood is a challenge within qualitative research (C. M. Clark & Sharf, 2007). Reading their reflective essays was also a way of avoiding this possible misunderstanding.

Reliability within qualitative research means the quality of the information and the data presented (Thagaard, 2003). In order to maintain a high level of reliability, I have decided to include direct quotes from the interviews and observations. Some of the quotes were spoken in English, and will be presented exactly as they were stated. The rest were said in Norwegian, so I have translated them myself. I wished to translate them as accurately as possible, and this makes some of the quotes sound slightly strange in English. All the quotes have been approved by the participants before I used them, so that they could agree on my English translation. I did this to verify that their original meaning was presented correctly.

The analysing process is inspired by different inquiries and methods, and this can be both a strength and a difficulty to the study (Thagaard, 2003). I was able to discuss the findings with my supervisor, who also was present during the courses. Although he was not present during the debriefing sessions, he still had access to the TLCP reports of every participant, so he could help me understand and interpret the results and the situation.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

“Regarding professional background or formalised guidelines the superior ethical obligation to the researcher is seeking the truth” (Leseth & Tellmann, 2014, p. 188).

When engaging in a research process, the ethical considerations and responsibilities that follow are the researcher’s responsibility, and a choice of methods is also a choice of ethics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Leseth & Tellmann, 2014). As a qualitative researcher, I am responsible for my research process and all the people involved. In order for me to access the relevant information I needed, I engaged in a relation built on trust and a safe environment with my informants. I wanted to explore people’s stories and perspectives, and since I easily can provoke or affect the telling of these stories, it is important to take responsibility.

Qualitative research is profoundly a personal activity, and the information given can be sensitive and private. Since I hold the power to present the data through the research material, the ethical considerations is therefore also my responsibility to be aware of and take into consideration before starting a research process (C. M. Clark & Sharf, 2007). I made ethical considerations throughout the entire process, as it is a responsibility I have from the very beginning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This project let me gain access into peoples’ lives, leading me to be responsible for the situation, the person, the material and how it is presented (Eide & Skorstad, 2013).

Since I am responsible and in charge of the research process, I have presented the data through systematic and transparent procedures (Leseth & Tellmann, 2014). All research projects that include personal information about participants needs to be reported to and approved by the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Service (NSD). I received a letter of confirmation from them that confirmed I could proceed with my plan. This letter can be found in Appendix E. My duty as a researcher is also to inform all my participants about the research process, their involvement and the intention of my study. I told them about this personally and I also sent an email explaining all the different elements of my study. I told them that participating in my study was completely voluntary, and that all the information they share with me will be confidential and kept away from others at all times. I have also been open and critical about my references, to clearly show what is my own work, and what is the work of others (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Leseth & Tellmann, 2014).

I have followed the ethical guidelines that we are imposed to follow from The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2006). One of these guidelines is informed consent, meaning the informants are participating freely and are informed about the project. My participants received information about this during than course, and later in writing. In this informed consent, I made it explicit that they can at any time resign from the project without stating a reason for it. They were also informed about the goal of the research, confidentiality and their rights as participants (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). The information letter about my research project that can be found in Appendix D.

Maintaining confidential material when conducting a research study is of utmost importance (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). To ensure this, I made sure that the material was hidden away from others. By material, I mean all my notes from the observations and my personal experience, the videos they made, the reflection essays and the transcriptions of the interviews. In addition to this, it is essential to maintain professional secrecy towards other colleagues or friends, so I did not share information about the participants with anyone except my supervisor. This was important in order maintain the privacy of the individuals (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). As the informants have a right to confidentiality, I used fictional names and anonymized their background and workplace. I also anonymized the name of the leadership course. The most prominent part of the ethical considerations is that it should not be possible to trace the information back to a specific person (C. M. Clark & Sharf, 2007).

In the next section, data found using these methods will be presented.

4.0 Presentation of the Data

The goal for this chapter is to present the research data and lay a basis for the arguments in the discussion chapter. The categories and subcategories emerged during the process of structuring the data. It is grounded in the experiences of my participants along with my interpretations that were part of the process of sorting their experiences into meaningful forms to present here. I will not include any of my personal experiences at this moment, but they will be used to empower the discussion chapter later. I will specify clearly which quotes that are from my observations and from the debriefing sessions. Quotes that are not specified otherwise, are participant statements from the interviews. Since all the research participants were attending the same leadership course, I have taken into consideration that their actions and answers can have been affected by each other, and by the course's material.

4.1 Description of the Categories

The experience of receiving feedback is complex, and involves a timeline covering different aspects. The complexity of the case study and the data material made it suitable to present the data in a chronological, linear order, as I followed the different processes of receiving feedback. This is to show explicitly what had happened through each of the phases of the case. Through the analysing process of the empirical data, there emerged three main descriptive categories that followed this chronological order. I have chosen to describe them as: the anxiousness of anticipation, the experience of receiving feedback and the results of receiving feedback. The first category focuses on the leaders' experience before receiving feedback, the second category brings up the emotions and thoughts that arose when they received the profiles and sat through the debriefing session with the coach, and the third category presents what happened after they received feedback.

4.2 The Anxiousness of Anticipation

This category presents the reactions before receiving feedback in this leadership course. This means the time between the first session and when they received the TLCP report during the second session. Throughout this time the participants were to find enough colleagues, subordinates and others to fill in the TLCP survey and prepare themselves for the results and the debrief session. For this category I only used data from the interviews, as I did not observe them before they received their reports.

The main emotion that all four participants described, was the emotion in Norwegian referred to as 'spent'. This word describes a feeling that lies between nervous and excited, and taut or anxious in a slightly positive way. Another English word that could describe this emotion is antsy, which I will use as the translation of 'spent' for the rest of this thesis. This was the first emotion they all referred to before they elaborated what it meant to them and what else arose. The emotions they had varied from individual to individual, but they were all excited and anxious in some way. John and Uma seemed more prepared for the report, while Gabrielle and Peter seemed more uncertain of what to expect. All the participants were emotionally affected in some way before they received feedback.

John started describing his feelings before reading the report, referring to the anxious excitement: "There is of course an antsy feeling, but at the same time I didn't feel that I dreaded the results very much" and "I think this will be just fine." John is also the only participant who has completed a TLCP once before, so this became his second time around with this type of feedback. He added some aspects from this:

> I think I possibly had an expectation or was nervous that it would be a worse result than last time… I think. Because I don't want to get a worse result the second time. So I'm not sure if I looked forward to the results, but I think that I didn't fear them either.

Peter explained his feelings before the session as:

> the feeling of expectation, slight insecurity, expectations to what will come, right. I would say that I had an antsy feeling and a type of nervousness. Slightly mixed feelings. There is also some excitement, I was anxious, but I didn't fear it.

Peter elaborated on the difference between two of the emotions: "I would say it was fifty-fifty excitement and nervousness, because it is the antsy feeling I felt most of, it is like a positive nervousness." Gabrielle and Uma also explained the anxious feeling, in addition to excitement, curiosity and expectation. Gabrielle stated that she was looking forward to receiving feedback. She later told that she was mostly focused on if she had a correct view of herself or not:

> I think I have a sense of who I am, but I don't know, so I think that is what I was most curious about. Do I have a correct view of the world and myself or not? So the excitement and anticipation considering this was occupying me, but I was not afraid of critical comments.

Uma told me that even though she felt prepared for what was coming, she could remember feeling a little stressed right before they received the reports:

> I was a little bit stressed. I don't know if that is because I think that it will be a lot of work with all the traits I can't change. No, I'm not sure. It's scary what they can all see from these results. I was also looking forward to it, though.

When I asked Gabrielle what she thought about receiving constructive feedback, she stated that it is something she enjoys and is open to at all times: “I think I in general appreciate feedback, because I’m afraid of truths that aren’t said. So I’m excited because I know this will be valuable for me.” She was also worried that some of her colleagues would withhold information from her, or refrain from giving completely honest feedback.

Uma agreed that constructive feedback is very important. She also mentioned that she knows what people think about her, because she is used to receiving spontaneous feedback from colleagues: “I talk to people about how things are going. So also anxious in a positive way.” Then she mentioned that she had not thought very much about the TLCP before she met the others during the second class gathering, because she was not worried about the result: “I was sure it would be ok.”

During their interview, when we were talking about their general view of feedback, they all explicitly stated that constructive feedback is a key element in order to develop as leaders, and that it is important for them as leaders to ask for regular feedback.

The participants had different experiences with receiving feedback before this leadership course. John continuously received feedback at work, from his colleagues, subordinates and leader. The others were used to progress conversations with their leader in addition to feedback-forms that their colleagues filled out. Uma had also experienced spontaneous feedback from some of her colleagues.

Apart from antsy and anxious, the main emotions and thoughts that were mentioned were excitement, nervousness, curiousness and expectation.

4.3 The Experience of Receiving Feedback

Now I will present the data gathered to shed light on the moment when they first read their reports individually, and later the debriefing sessions they had with a coach to discuss the report. This category aims to understand the initial reaction to the felt experience of receiving feedback. The data used in this category is observations from the participants reading the reports, observations from the debriefing sessions they had and the interviews I had with them after the course was finished. The quotes from the debriefing sessions with the coach will be clearly distinguished from the interview quotes, as it is important to acknowledge that the citations from the debriefs are their spontaneous reactions, while their statements during the interviews have given them the chance to reflect on the information first. This category presents the experiences in two subcategories; *the first impression of feedback* and *the debrief.*

4.3.1 The First Impression of Feedback

When the course participants received their profiles, I got to observe all the participants that attended the course, and their reactions varied a lot. Some were sitting completely still, others started crying and some were even laughing. I did not interview the others later about their reactions, but I have talked to Gabrielle, Uma, Peter and John about their first reactions, what it meant to them and how they have reflected on this reaction at a later time. All four of them reacted differently, and their individual experiences will be presented here. Each of the debriefing sessions focused on what the individual wondered about, so also the observations here varied individually. The core feature of this category seems to be the gap between how they view themselves, and how others view them. They all mentioned this during their interviews without me asking explicitly about it. Apart from this, they all focused on their own results from the report.

When I observed the participants reading their reports, I noticed that John was smiling and nodding while turning the pages. At times it even seemed that he was chuckling to himself. I presented this information to John during the interview, and asked him about it:

> That is right! I thought the results were surprisingly good. I don't feel that I have changed much as a leader since then, but there are many profile changes that are positive. So I question if others' view of me has changed…

He is here talking about the differences between this report, and the report from last time he completed TLCP. I also saw Uma reading the report silently without any facial expressions or movements that I could notice. To this she pointed out that she did not want to appear too happy because some of the other course participants were crying and seemed upset over their results. Gabrielle on the other hand, was shaking her head and placing her hands on her head. She responded that she couldn't remember reacting like this, but it probably was because she wasn't prepared for this result. She then mentioned that it could have been she didn't understand the tool and all the numbers presented. She said that she wished she understood the TLCP better before receiving the report, and that she would have wanted more time to prepare before the debriefing session. Peter was sitting steady while nodding and smiling to himself. To this he told me that there was so much going on in him, but that he does not show emotions on the outside: "It is who I am as a person, and even though I didn't feel like crying or laughing, I still like to keep my emotions to myself."

They all had very different experiences with their reports. John's first reaction was to analyse the actual circle of the TLCP. He wanted to quickly compare his own results to the feedback from others, and compare it to the previous TLCP he had completed: “I immediately made some comparisons, and some of them I looked at more structurally and systematic. I started breaking down the different components, looking at changes from last time.” John also questioned the reliability of the feedback answers: “I also question which responses are most right. The people writing them know me, so that can trigger an emotional response.”

Gabrielle had been surprised by the result: “I think it was like taking a hit to the chest. That I lost my breath. So absolutely the feeling that I lost my breath.” She explained how she entered a stage of shock, and that she found it difficult to observe herself and think about what had happened: “It was like vacuum, or that someone had clashed together cymbals in front of my head and the sound was so loud that you just stand there and can’t hear or think or anything.”

Uma on the other hand, had found it interesting and enjoyable to read the report and the comments: “I quickly noticed that I scored high in the creative part, which was really nice because I know that is good.” She said that her colleagues had scored her much more positive than she had scored herself: “I scored myself quite mediocre, but they gave me such high scores. This surprised me a lot.”

Peter pointed out the parts of the report he was disappointed over, which was where he was rated differently than expected: “I remember… I see myself as a person who can accommodate collaboration and teamwork and that is part of the relational part of the circle.” He brought up this as it for him is an important part of his role as a leader. It was therefore tough for him to be scored lower than anticipated.

Gabrielle later points out that it was not the results she was shocked over, it was the gap between how she had rated herself and how others had rated her: “**Do I really not see myself at all?** That was my first reaction, and I couldn’t think about anything else at that moment.” She mentions disappointment, because the traits that mattered most to her was where she was rated lower than she had hoped. This also laid a shadow over the positive feedback she had received, and she didn’t even notice it at first: “That day the positive feedback I got had no importance to me,” she told me. Like Gabrielle, Peter had also reacted to this with disappointment: “It was the distance or gap… I wondered what it meant. Was I really so out of pace with myself?” John also quickly mentioned the gap between how he had rated himself, and how others had rated him: “There are some positive changes here that I don’t really see myself. And there are many places I have rated myself completely different from what my colleagues have.” An example he presented was that some perceive him as slightly arrogant, but he does not see himself this way. Uma said that the details in her report were at first irrelevant for her, because the broader picture caught her attention. As the others, she focused on the gap between own and others' perceptions: "It was important to look at the gap between how I rated myself and how others rated me."

4.3.2 The Debrief

For this subcategory, I will present my observations and the participants' experience of the debriefing sessions they received. The structure in all the debriefs were similar, but since it consisted of four different people and their personal reports, I have decided to present the results from this session individually for each participant.

During the debriefing session, I noticed that John smiled very much, used his hands many times when he has talking, and several times he leaned back in his chair. His comments to my observation was that he had participated in this before and he knew the coach, making it a very comfortable and harmless situation for him. He also mentioned that he is a controlled person who would refrain from showing strong emotions in a setting like this, even if the result was bad. His thoughts on the debrief session was that it would be a good opportunity to discuss the results, and maybe start thinking forward. He also reflected on the impact of the result: "I am mostly happy about the result. Of course, some of the negative feedback I got hurt more than others, but I have at least improved from last time." During the debrief session, I observed him say: "I am a little anxious about others' meanings and thoughts of me." Later he told me he referred to a specific part of his profile that rated him high on arrogance and perfectionism, which was an area he was trying to figure out more about. He admitted that it was slightly painful to see that this was others' perceptions of him as a leader. John tried to explain the results to himself: "At some point I entered into a form of defence or denial because I didn't quite agree with the negative results, but all in all it was a positive experience that forced me to reflect." Apart from these factors, John was very happy with the results from his report.

Gabrielle had been looking forward to the debriefing session. She had high expectations, as she hoped that the coach could help her with her feedback results. She also told me that it was difficult to remember the debrief because she was so shocked over her results. For Gabrielle, I observed that the first thing she said was: "Am I really not self-aware?" I asked her about this statement during the interview, and she said it was about her shock over the gap between what she thinks of herself and what her colleagues think of her. I also told her that she kept her arms crossed during the session. To this she responded that she remembered feeling tense and distracted, which probably resulted in her difficulty remembering the session. Gabrielle also said she used a lot of energy in order to handle the situation: “It makes sense that this came through in my body language, because I felt really tense inside. But at the same time I was genuinely interested in receiving feedback.” During the interview she also told me: “I see that others think I have high thoughts of myself, and that hurts me.” She explains this by saying she does not act on selfish grounds, even though it for some might seem that she does. Her main motivation is the group and not herself: “I’m only happy when others are happy.” Throughout the debrief she realised that much of the feedback she had gotten was actually really good. She still kept coming back to the constructive parts: “They don’t hear what I wish to communicate, they hear something else.”

When I asked Uma about the debriefing session, she said that I probably remembered more than her because she had felt empty-headed and a little stressed. So I told her the first thing she had said when the debriefing started: “I am very critical of myself. Apparently I have low self-awareness.” I asked her if she could remember this statement. “Oh! Yes… I think I meant the gap between how I view myself and how others view me.” She paused for a minute and then continued with “I have very high expectations of myself. Much higher than others have to me. I always think that I have to do better.” This also led her to remember how it was to be there during this session: “It felt fine actually, I enjoy talking one-on-one with people. It is what I do best.” She did not recall much else, so I brought a new observation to her attention. I told her she had said that others had rated her high on system awareness and she found it odd. To this she answered; “I always think that I am not a structured person. I was so surprised that others see me like this.” She also told me that she felt more and more comfortable throughout the debriefing session: “My result was so positive, so it was easy. Earlier when we were reading our reports I saw others cry, and this affected me more than my own results.” During the debriefing session, Uma reacted to my presence by looking at me many times throughout the session. I asked her what that meant and if that could have affected the session. She answered that she was certain it did not change anything, and she just wanted me to feel comfortable and noticed.

Peter told me he felt very comfortable during the debriefing session: “There is a person there trying to help you understand” he said. “I was anxious of the factors where I scored low. When I read about ‘distance’ in the report it was quite traumatising.” Peter wondered if he was just as bad as how the TLCP manual had explained the trait ‘distance,’ and had reacted with; “I might have some competencies my colleagues don’t see.” For Peter, as it had been when he read his report, his main concern during this session was the gap that he already mentioned earlier.

> It was about what it meant. Because this is about self-awareness and that part. Nobody wants to be blind to their own traits, of course. Reflecting on my own role as a leader is important, that is why I am taking this leadership course in the first place.

Peter's feelings at the end of the debrief consisted of relief and a sense of safety: "I would have wanted more time, the TLCP is so complex. Some things are hard to understand." At the same time, he mentioned that more time might have made everything more overwhelming: "You have to choose only some things to work on anyways."

Their reactions to the debrief varied from surprise, relief, anger, denial, thoughts on personal growth and state of self-awareness. Although Gabrielle felt like she was hit in the chest, and Uma mostly felt happy, they all mentioned aspects from their report that they were not aware of before. Even John, who had completed a TLCP earlier had reacted to some elements of his new report. The fact that they all had some parts of them confirmed or that completely surprised them, makes all their cases available for personal growth and increased self-awareness. This will be explored in the next category.

4.4 The Results of Receiving Feedback

For the last main category, I will present my findings from what happened after the debrief. This category includes two subcategories: *the processes of receiving feedback* and *the actions coming from receiving feedback.* The first subcategory presents their reflection processes and thoughts on their own development after receiving feedback. The second category means to show their personal development, and therefore includes reflective actions and measures they took after receiving feedback.

4.4.1 The Processes of Receiving Feedback

For this part I have used data from my observations, the interviews and the video presentations they showed during the leadership course. I will present the processes that started in the participants after the debriefing session. In general, they all had some reflections over the feedback they had received, but they reacted differently to the phase after the debrief. Gabrielle, Peter and Uma found elements for improvement that they wished to explore, while John seemed to avoid talking about his reflections, and did not immediately find something he wanted to work on.

After the debriefing session, Gabrielle realizes that she has some issues she needs to work on as a leader. She reflects on the impact receiving feedback has had for her: “I have spent much time looking at what I need to work on, I will write about it in my exam.” She tells me that it is the process that started after the debriefing session where she has learnt the most. She says she has not come far enough with her development yet, and that this is something she wishes to work on in the future: “The theoretical part of me is much more developed than the practical part.” With this she means that she is thinking about seeing through actions much more than she actually does. She wants to develop as a leader by starting to set her thoughts into action. Gabrielle starts thinking about how she behaves towards others, and that she wants to get better at leading and facilitating teams and group discussions: “The feedback I have received is something that will give me a lot in the future.”

Peter’s reflective process started during the debrief. He felt it was crucial to start doing something about the result: “The TLCP has given me a better insight into why certain behaviours are prominent, as they are seen in relation to other behaviours that are more distant.” Peter wanted to dig deeper into the areas of distance and relationships. He also points out that the result of the report inspired him to improve.

John explained that the reflective processes were much more distinct the last time he had completed the TLCP: “I remember thinking about how I was viewed by others, and trying to understand this from a different perspective.” John tells me that they focus a lot on continuous feedback at his office, so this TLCP did not “revolutionise my world”, as he said he knew most of it from before. At the same time, he states that it is important to understand why you have received the feedback, and this process started in him after the debrief session: “Even though I didn’t feel very affected by the feedback I received, I still want to reflect on why I got the result that I did.”

Uma told me during the interview that improving her self-esteem and finding the courage to speak her opinion at work were the main elements where she wished to develop as a leader. This can be seen in relation to what I observed Uma say during the debrief session: “My boss thinks I manage things much better than I think I do” and “I don’t always tell people if I disagree with them.” Uma’s report showed that her colleagues think she does a great job, and I asked her about the gap between her own and others view of herself. She replies that she has started to reflect on this, and tried to understand why: “Maybe to not give the impression that I think highly of myself. Or maybe I’ve given myself the role as a victim. I don’t really need to be seen all the time.”

During the last class gathering, Uma told the group: “I have learnt that people listen more to me than I thought they did.” To this she elaborates that after the debrief session, she started studying her own development. She had read the comments from the TLCP, and seen how her colleagues listen to her and want her to express her opinions more often: “It was a good experience, and it is something I am much more aware of now.” These elements were illustrated in Uma’s video, where she practices speaking up in a meeting and disagreeing with her boss: “Acting this out in a video actually helped me to practice this in real life as well.”

Gabrielle told me that she spent a lot of time preparing her video; thinking about the area where she wanted to develop as a leader, and how to present it through a video. She wrote many notes before she decided how she wanted to express herself. Working with this video had made her certain that she had chosen an important theme for her essay and for her future development. For Gabrielle, it was this video that started the process in her that helped her deal with the feedback she had received. Knowing that there are ways to work with the results made it seem less helpless. Gabrielle told me that because they were forced to interpret and reflect on themselves throughout the leadership course, she felt that she was more responsible for her own development afterwards: “It was not the actual TLCP that gave me this insight, it was what comes after. How to deal with the feedback and what to do to become a better leader.”

John decided to make his video more humoristic in order to remove some of the focus on the content. This resulted in the group giving him more feedback on the video’s layout than the actual content: “This was a conscious choice from my side, as I dodged slightly away from what I didn’t want to talk about.”

For Peter, the video was about how he could improve and what he had learnt: “I wanted to be vulnerable and honest, and this was expressed through the conversation in my video.” During the video presentation, I observed him tell the others that he hoped he had started his development as a leader. To this he explained that he had reflected much on his ability to create relationships with his colleagues, and wanted to start working with this as quickly as possible.

4.4.2 The Actions Coming from Receiving Feedback

Until now, the main features of the data material have been focusing on reactions, experience and reflections in relation to receiving feedback. Now I wish to present some examples of the concrete actions the participants have set in motion after receiving feedback through the TLCP and the leadership course. All the course participants needed to choose an area from their report which they wanted to focus on, and work on their own improvement after the course. After this they were to write a reflective essay as their course exam where they described their development. Peter and Gabrielle had the most concrete examples from their development, Uma had a couple, and John had not chosen to work on anything in particular from the report.

Peter chose to work on his ability to create relationships with his colleagues and subordinates. His TLCP showed a high score on 'distance,' which can be found on the opposite side of the relational part of the report. Peter chose this area because he felt this was an important issue to address as a leader. The scores he received in the 'distance' area both surprised and disappointed him. In order to do something about this, he started to integrate small relational habits into his workday. Examples are that he spent more time using small talk and engaging in conversation with his colleagues. He also created a profile on Facebook, allowing them to see more of his personal life: "Maybe they can see me more as a person and not just a boss." He told me that this is something he would have been scared of before, but that he has pushed himself to do it. Another example is that he was invited to a coffee break with his subordinates at work. He decided not to join them, but reflected on this decision later. He saw that choosing not to go, was his immediate reaction, but not what he really wanted. This was a result of the reflection process he started after the debrief: "It isn't the biggest things, and I don't think they will see the difference within a month. But I hope that over time, it can be noticed." These actions resulted in Peter sharing "I think I am closer to my colleagues now" at the last course session. He told me that this was a comment to the process he is going through at the moment, which is about giving more of himself. He also shared with me that he thinks the process that started after the debrief has given him a permanent focus.

> I mean that what I have learnt during this course will not be forgotten the day I deliver my exam. The changes I make are often small day-to day things that focus on building better relationships. I have received positive feedback on this, giving me the feeling that the leadership course provoked a positive change in me.

Gabrielle started observing herself and her behavior after the debrief: "I realized that I sugarcoat things for my subordinates, and after the leadership course I thought to myself how I could have solved things differently." She practiced giving more constructive feedback and help to her subordinates, and avoided shying away from the issues that needed to be handled. Gabrielle had also started to adjust her behavior in meetings. They had a discussion at her workplace where everyone was to report back on how the meetings could be more efficient, and what Gabrielle could do. She realized it takes time and practice to develop, and it is something she must work with continuously. Even though she has tried to alter some behaviors, it was very difficult for her to find new ways to facilitate collaboration in a team. Gabrielle hoped that her communicational alterations could make her a stronger leader: “If the theory is right, I should be a less “pleasing” person next year. And people will maybe see me as a more real and better leader that facilitates group meetings in a more effective way.”

Uma also wanted to achieve some direct results, and had practiced expressing her opinion more often at work. She also told one of her colleagues that she disagreed with her. It was uncomfortable for Uma, but the video assignment helped her try out these actions in real life.

On the other hand, John shared during the last class gathering: “I don’t think it has had any impact yet, but I think it might.” John did not want to share his experience with the other participants. He told me that he did not feel an urge to develop or work with anything in particular at that moment: “I feel that I rather develop continuously as a leader by receiving feedback every day. I don’t need to make some huge changes at the moment.” At the same time, John mentioned that he thinks something might happen to him over time through awareness and attention to own behaviors. He tells me that motivation is very important for him in order to get things done, and that the TLCP profile did not motivate him enough at this point: “It was much stronger last time, and I remember that I reflected more and worked on different aspects of myself.” A concrete measure John took last time he completed the TLCP was to tell his colleagues about the behaviour he wished to change. Then he let them observe him, and report back to him how he had been.

My reason for presenting this data chronologically, has been to present and explore the unique phases of receiving feedback. I have analysed the chronological categories from this chapter in order to lay a foundation for discussing the different themes that emerged from this data. The themes that I discovered will be presented in the next chapter.

5.0 Discussion

Now I will continue by discussing my research question: **"How are leaders in an academic leadership course affected by the experience of receiving feedback?"** I will explore this by discussing the data in relation to relevant theory and my heuristic experience of receiving feedback.

To simply discuss each of the chronological categories separately did not seem suitable. The themes and reflections did not necessarily follow the same chronological order, but consisted of a broader picture of patterns and common ground that covered several categories at the same time. Also, each of the categories in chapter four had more limited discussion potential on their own than in a wider context. I would therefore like to discuss the broader perspectives considering receiving feedback, to better understand the complete experience. By analysing the data and finding the key concepts of the chronological categories in the previous chapter, there emerged certain themes for the discussion. I have chosen to present these core elements as 1) general remarks on feedback to leaders, 2) the gap between how leaders view themselves and how others view them, 3) feedback and emotions, 4) feedback and leadership development and 5) my heuristic perspective of receiving feedback. In addition, the different phases of feedback and perspectives on self-awareness are presented within each category as they cut across all of them.

5.1 General Remarks on Feedback to Leaders

For this section, I will discuss some general remarks considering the participants' thoughts and perspectives of receiving feedback. I will present their previous perceptions of feedback and explore this in relation to their experiences with the TLCP feedback. I will also bring in other elements that might have affected their overall experience. This is to grasp more of the entire process they have been through.

As previously discussed, the TLCP and other feedback tools is a way for leaders to actively receive feedback in order to reflect over their own leadership skills (Anderson & Adams, 2016; Boyd, 2014; Nieminen et al., 2013; Robertson, 2009). The experience of these tools can be affected by their backgrounds, their expectations and their level of self-awareness (Buron & Mann, 2011). Before completing the TLCP, the participants had quite different backgrounds and experience with receiving feedback. John had completed TLCP once before, and engaged in regular feedback from subordinates and leaders daily through his work. Because of this he was more prepared for the report and the debrief session, and he was also able to compare his results from last time. This could be one of the reasons that he seemingly was least affected by the TLCP results. Uma had also experienced receiving spontaneous feedback from her colleagues at work. Although she still underestimated her performance, this experience might have unconsciously helped her prepare for the results in some way. In comparison, Gabrielle and Peter were only used to progression conversations with their leader and feedback-forms, where colleagues could write suggestions for improvement. This lack of direct feedback from their subordinates might have affected how they reacted to their TLCP reports. It could have resulted in their experience of shock and disappointment, as it was not something they were used to or expected. From this I see a pattern that the more feedback they have received earlier, the more it prepares them for future feedback (Ashford, 2013; Nieminen et al., 2013). By this I mean that it is likely that their previous understandings and backgrounds have affected their experience, reactions and their view of feedback.

I mentioned earlier how feedback is essential to grow as a leader. Leaders who actively seek feedback are seen as more open and visionary, as they gain access to how others perceive their assets and abilities (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; S. Clark, 2013; Lam et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2002). Before the leadership course, the participants had all agreed that leaders need to actively seek feedback, as it is very important in order for them to develop as leaders. Still, most of them lacked a way of integrating this into their daily work-lives. This is worth reflecting upon. Three of the participants were not used to actively receiving feedback before they participated in the leadership course. Reasons for this could be that they had not considered this earlier, that they fear the result of the feedback, or that they actually do not wish to hear what others think of them (Ashford, 2013). It seems that there is a gap between what they say is important, and what they actually see through at work. This can be seen in relation to the gap between espoused theory and theories-in-use, which is the difference between what people say that they will do, and what they actually do (Argyris, 1980; Argyris & Schön, 1978).

The core element considering feedback, is that constructive feedback is the most effective (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Conlon, 1980; Hacker, 2003). All the participants stated that receiving constructive feedback is of utmost important, and that this is something they are open to at all times. However, the constructive feedback was what had disappointed them the most when they received their reports, leading to signs of denial and other defence mechanisms (Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Jordan, 2011; Nesbit, 2012; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). An example of this is how Gabrielle stated before receiving feedback: “I think I in general appreciate feedback, because I'm afraid of truths that aren't said. So I'm excited because I know this will be valuable for me." Although she appreciated the feedback at a later time, her initial reaction showed signs of defence mechanisms and disappointment.

This leads me to believe that perspectives considering feedback in advance of receiving feedback, are not necessarily the same as the actual experience of feedback. There is a gap between what is said, and what is done (Argyris, 1980). Stating that feedback is important, and that you are open for receiving feedback at all times might be the 'correct' thing to say as a leader (Argyris, 1980; Argyris & Schön, 1978), but the experience is individual, and will vary according to background, level of self-awareness, previous experience and timing (Buron & Mann, 2011).

Another important notion worth mentioning, is the reliability of the answers they received through their reports. As Hacker (2003) and Taylor (2013) state, it is important to insure honest feedback from someone who knows you well. Some of the participants questioned if they actually could rely on the answers they received. True answers cannot be completely guaranteed, as subordinates might answer what they think the leader wants to hear (Selvik, 2005). John wondered if he could consider all of the responses to be correct, and acknowledged that the people answering could have been affected by their relationship to him. Gabrielle was also afraid that some of her colleagues would withhold the truth from her in order to please her. Apart from the feedback from the participants' leaders, the TLCP responses are anonymous, so because of this there might be a higher chance that the answers were honest (Dalal, Lin, & Smith, 2008).

A way to ensure reliability of feedback, is to continuously ask for feedback in a safe environment and from someone who will benefit from the improvement (Kirkland & Manoogian, 1998; Selvik, 2005). This was the case for most of the responses, as those who gave feedback were mostly colleagues that the participants worked with directly. In addition to this, they reflected on what could have caused the different feedback that was presented, and even asked others they knew if they agreed with this. Although some of the feedback they received was hard to believe at first, they could all understand the underlying assumptions after they had reflected on it. Because of this, I assume that the feedback received from the TLCP is reliable, but at the same time I acknowledge that the feedback credibility could have been a factor (Dalal et al., 2008).

5.2 The Gap Between How Leaders View Themselves and How Others View Them

The TLCP aims to help leaders improve their self-perception in order to increase leadership effectiveness. This is done through self-ratings in addition to others rating the individual on the same behaviours and traits (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Adams, 2016). Yammarino and Atwater (1997) state that self-ratings often tend to be inaccurate in comparison to the rating of others. Avoiding feedback upholds this gap between how people see themselves and how others see them. I saw a clear connection between this theory and my results. When talking about the participants' experience of receiving feedback, the incongruity of the results or this gap was the main factor that they all mentioned, despite different emotions, reactions and results. Although it was not a consistent factor throughout the entire result, it was present in all the reports and led them into confusion, reflection and later to actions (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012).

As a reaction to this gap, the participants questioned their level of self-awareness connected to their leadership. For example, right after receiving the results, Gabrielle had exclaimed; **"do I really not see myself at all?"** She also asked the coach during the debrief session if this meant that she lacked self-awareness. Peter had also wondered why he was so out of pace with himself, and brought it up to his attention: "It was about what it means. Because this is about self-awareness and that part. Nobody wants to be blind to their own traits, of course." He brings in self-awareness as something that he needs to develop. Uma had also stated; "apparently I have low self-awareness." Hall (2004) refers to self-awareness as an evaluative component, as it measures a person's ability to observe and measure the self objectively and accurately. According to this theory, the participants lack self-awareness, as they all perceived themselves different from others. On the other hand, Jordan (2002, 2011) claims self-awareness to mean turning attention towards internal processes, which was what all the participants were doing during this course. These observations and statements lead me to believe that my participants questioned and started reflecting over their own process of self-awareness as a result of receiving feedback.

5.2.1 The Rating Types

Yammarino and Atwater (1997) presented four different rating types when it comes to one's own performance: the over-estimator, the in-agreement/good, the in-agreement/bad and the under-estimator. For this section, I will discuss the participants in light of these types.

Gabrielle had stated that she was shocked over her TLCP results being so negative, and I see similarities with an over-estimator. She recognized that she had estimated herself higher than the others, and reacted with; “I see that I have high thoughts of myself, and that hurts me.” This made her reflect on the feedback she had received, the emotional impact it had created and the way others perceive her. Peter had been rated worse than expected, and was stunned by the difference in perspective: “Was I really so out of pace with myself?” He also said that he sees himself as someone who accommodates teamwork and relationships at work, but his ratings told him otherwise. On the basis of this I would also suggest he is an over-estimator. There could be a connection between this rating type and their previous experience that I mentioned in section 5.1. It is common for leaders to rate themselves higher than others, especially for those who seldom receive feedback (Kets De Vries et al., 2004; Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Gabrielle and Peter were those who had the least experience with receiving feedback, and they had also overestimated themselves.

John had a mixed experience with this gap, as he said that there were both positive changes that he had not seen himself, and he saw that he is viewed a lot more arrogant than he sees himself. Seen in relation to Yammarino and Atwater’s rating-types, I would say that John has elements of all four of them. This is because he mentioned that there were positive changes he wasn’t aware of (under-estimator), there were negative changes he wasn’t aware of (over-estimator), but for most he agreed on the positive feedback, as the rating type in-agreement/good. Interestingly though, his later actions are most similar to those of an in-agreement/poor, as leaders in this category tend to take few actions to improve performance. John had the most experience with receiving feedback, and this might have resulting in him having a clearer view of himself in comparison to the other participants. Earlier, he also referred to how he received continuous feedback where he worked. Even though he was anxious that the results would be worse than expected, he said he was quite sure of what to expect this time.

Before receiving their report, Uma had mentioned that she thought she knew what other people thought of her, and was therefore looking forward to the results of the TLCP. The results showed that Uma had been rated much higher by others than she had rated herself, making her an under-estimator. When I asked her why she thinks this gap exists she answered; “maybe not to give the impression that I think highly of myself. Or maybe I’ve given myself the role as a victim. I don’t really need to be seen all the time.” She even admitted that it was important for her to not seem arrogant. These statements can all be seen in relation to characteristics of an under-estimator, as they are modest or incapable of recognizing own strengths and potential. Another aspect is that she might have deliberately rated herself lower in order to avoid seeming arrogant.

Under-estimators, like Uma, tend to underachieve and be very critical of themselves. Throughout the leadership course, Uma realizes that this gap can have something to do with her thoughts of herself, and not her actions: “I have very high expectations of myself. Much higher that others have to me. I always think that I have to do better.” The awareness of how others saw her strengths became an inspiration for her. Even before she received her report, I expected Uma to be an under-estimator, as she reacted modestly in the leadership course, and mentioned how her opinions were unimportant. It could seem like Uma would benefit from improved self-esteem in order to enhance her leadership performance.

This leads me to see the connection between my participants and how Yammarino and Atwater (1997) present self-evaluation: “we are not very good at evaluating ourselves or seeing ourselves as others see us.” Also, many leaders do not wish to hear what others think of them (Ashford, 2013). Even though all the participants agreed that they want to receive feedback and that feedback is important for leadership development, it was clear from the antsy feeling and the surprizing results that it can be difficult to take in the fact that you are viewed worse than how you see yourself. As self-ratings often are higher than the ratings of others (Kets De Vries et al., 2004), it can result in much disappointment when actively seeking feedback through 360-degree tools like the TLCP. In my case, it was Peter and Gabrielle that had clearly rated themselves higher than others, while John and Uma were modest in comparison. This shows that the participants were very different, as there were two clear over-estimators, and one clear under-estimator, and one who showed tendencies to all four rating-types (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). This also underpins the notion that leaders are very different and their personalities will affect their style of leadership.

5.3 Feedback and Emotions

As I found out through my data, many emotions arose before, during and after the feedback session for all of the participants. This can be seen in relation to the theory that receiving feedback triggers emotional reactions (Buron & Mann, 2011; Jordan, 2002; Nesbit, 2012; Niemann et al., 2014). All of my participants recognized some emotions connected to feedback, and this affected them in different ways. The main emotion all my participants referred to in advance of receiving feedback, is the antsy feeling described in the previous chapter. They also experienced being nervous, anxious, curious, excited, insecure, as well as they all mentioned the expectation of receiving feedback as a distinct emotion they could recall from that time.

5.3.1 Emotions Before Receiving Feedback

I found something interesting when I explored the participants' reactions before they received feedback. Uma was slightly stressed although she was the one who later received the most positive result. Peter was nervous and excited, and was later disappointed over the result. John was mostly excited, but also a little worried that the result would be worse than last time he took the TLCP. When he received the report almost all of the results were better the second time around. As for Gabrielle, she was looking forward to receiving feedback, but when she received the report the result came as a surprise to her. This shows me that the emotions related to anticipating feedback can be very different from the actual experience of the feedback. Reasons for this could be unawareness of what is about to come, or it might be a typical reaction before receiving feedback (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012). Goleman (2014) also states that a high level of self-awareness can help the individual to reflect on their emotions and the effect it can have on others. This leads me to conclude that situations where feedback is expected has an emotional effect on leaders, but to what extent varies from person to person and their level of emotional self-awareness (Goleman, 2014; Nesbit, 2012).

5.3.2 The Emotional Impact of Receiving Feedback

My observations of the participants reading their reports varied, but it was clear that it had triggered them all emotionally at different levels. A combination between observations and answers during the interviews helped me gain insight into what was going on inside them at this time. John's smiling and nodding was a reaction to the good results he got. As a side note, he later told me that he is a person to refrain from showing strong emotions at all times, even if the result had not been in his favour. Gabrielle had been shaking her head and holding her hands to her forehead as a reaction to the disappointing results. She said that the positive feedback had no importance to her the first time she read her report, and this can relate to the focus that constructive feedback gets when feedback is received (Hacker, 2003). When Uma opened her report, she had been reading silently to herself and refrained from showing any emotions that I could see. She had been very happy with the result, so this neutral reaction could be modest behaviour from her side, which is a typical trait for an under-estimator (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Peter was sitting steady and smiling to himself while reading. During the interview he told me how he tends to keep his emotions to himself during situations where others can see him.

Through these discoveries I would say that visible reactions are difficult to interpret, and only the individual can really know what is going on inside them. They can feel differently than they react, be aware not to let the emotions show or be affected by the situation and people around (Buron & Mann, 2011; Jordan, 2002). I would therefore say that my observations alone in this case were not significant enough to say anything about their emotional reactions. However, it was an effective way of helping them remember their reactions during the interviews. It also served as an extra perspective to the situation. Another implication, is that they might not be aware of what is going on inside them, which could be a reason for the surprises and discoveries they experienced. Presenting how I observed them could help them reflect on what had really happened. This way, the combination between observation and interviews was important in order to better understand the emotional impact of feedback.

5.3.3 Emotions and Constructive Feedback

The leadership course focused on helping the leaders receive constructive feedback from colleagues and others that know them well (Anderson, 2006; Kirkland & Manoogian, 1998). Through my research, I found that constructive feedback can result in anger, denial, rejection or other defensive responses (Ashford, 2013; Nesbit, 2012; Niemann et al., 2014). All of my participants showed elements of this when they were reading their reports and receiving the debrief. Gabrielle defended the result by explaining her intentions as a leader, and she had also said that "they don't hear what I wish to communicate, they hear something else." Uma had few signs of denial, but defended her own ratings by saying that she always thinks she can do better. Peter had mentioned that he might have competencies that his colleagues could not see, as a reaction to the high score he had received on 'distance.' Defending this area could have been triggered by his emotions, as this was a leadership skill he valued highly, making the disappointment greater when he had scored lower than anticipated. At the same time John had made his own theories in order to justify the result of 'arrogance' to himself. Although he was mostly relaxed and happy during the debrief, there were still signs of defensive reactions. For example, he mentioned entering into a state of denial because he did not agree with this result, and he was anxious of how others viewed him. This relates to what Nesbit (2012) says about constructive feedback being a threat to one's self-esteem. These reactions have similar aspects to the first developmental phase of emotional self-awareness (Jordan, 2002). They notice and experience the emotions that arrive, but lack an evaluation or the ability to transform the emotions. Later they reflected on their emotional state and acted on the experience, which can relate to the second phase that Jordan presents (Jordan, 2002).

Gabrielle had also showed some strong emotions during the debrief, as a result of the constructive feedback. Strong emotions can make it frustrating to understand or explain a situation, which could have been what had happened to Gabrielle since she had trouble expressing herself during the debrief and remembering the debriefing session afterwards (Jordan, 2002). She clearly expressed that she was affected by these emotions, as she exclaimed that; "I think it was like taking a hit to the chest. That I lost my breath." Both my observations of her and what she told me during the interview can point to the internal process where individuals think and feel, but lack a conscious concept of what is going on (Jordan, 2002). This can also be seen in relation to what Jordan (2002) says about strong emotions filling out the person's field of awareness and completely dominating the experience. For Gabrielle, this could be the state of shock she had entered. Gabrielle told me that she had been tense and distracted during the debrief, which are typical leader reactions to constructive feedback (Butler et al., 1974).

Constructive feedback can cause tension, so a combination between constructive and positive feedback is most effective (Butler et al., 1974). However, Peter, Gabrielle and to some extent John, had mainly focused on the constructive feedback. Gabrielle had not even noticed the positive feedback she had received. This can be seen in relation to how constructive feedback receives the most attention (Hacker, 2003), and in comparison to what Buron and Mann (2011) say about how one's own level of self-awareness and timing can affect how feedback is received. Also, Kopelman and Gewurz (2013) state that learning to understand and take in these emotional reactions gives a better opportunity to act on the feedback. Taking this into account, I would say that increased self-awareness could help leaders to better understand and deal with the emotional impact that feedback can have.

Hacker (2003) states that it takes time and practice to deal with constructive feedback, and leaders need to learn skills for this. According to Nesbit (2012), self-reflection is a tool for managing the emotional impact of feedback, as it can help the leader welcome the feedback without the fear of the emotional reactions. As the TLCP and the leadership course forces the leaders to engage in reflective actions, it will hopefully help the leaders' journey towards better dealing with their emotions when they receive feedback.

5.4 Feedback and Leadership Development

For this section, I will present the developmental aspects the participants have shown or referred to throughout the leadership course. I will focus on how and to what degree the participants experienced feedback to be a tool for increased leadership development, and how it has helped them or not in their current jobs.

Naturally, their development has been very individual, as they are all different leaders who received individual feedback. However, I have seen many interesting similarities or patterns through the observations, interviews, video presentations and the reflective essay. As an overall judgement, I noticed that the two participants who got the harshest constructive feedback, were the ones who were focusing most on their development after the debrief. This could be a coincidence, or it could relate to what Ashford and Tsui (1991) say about constructive feedback being most effective for leadership development. This could also imply that there is coherence between how much the result of the feedback was expected and their personal motivation to improve and adjust behaviour.

The leadership course can be seen as an arena for active feedback-seeking, as it helps the participants ask for feedback from multiple sources. Even though there is a chance that this course was mandatory for their job and they did not choose to attend themselves, they have still engaged in a course that forces them to receive feedback and reflect on their own development as leaders. It is expected that leaders adjust behaviour and more effectively reach goals if they actively search for quality feedback (Ashford, 2013; Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Lam et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2002; Nieminen et al., 2013). According to this, after attending this leadership course, one should be able to expect some level of development from the participants. In this case, I would say that each of the participants made personal strategies in order to use the feedback in different ways. Although John chose not to focus on any particular areas of growth at this time, he still mentioned that change takes a long time for him, and that this might have been the beginning of a process. Important to notice here, is that he had made changes the last time he completed TLCP, so it could also be that he felt he had already begun this process, and did not need to explore new aspects at the moment. This means that all of the participants at some point chose to take in the feedback they received and work on their own development. I would therefore say that feedback inspires leaders to adjust behaviour and develop themselves.

The participants chose different paths for working with the feedback, but the overall impression was that small changes were noticeable a few weeks after they had received their TLCP. The common factor was that they all reflected on what this experience had meant to them, and they all made conscious choices on how this would affect them further. From this I see that they have reflected on internal and external aspects which can increase self-awareness

(Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012; Goleman, 2014; Jordan, 2002, 2011). They all mentioned their improved self-understanding after receiving feedback, and Joiner and Josephs (2007) mention the quality of this process as a way of developing one's self-awareness. As Hall (2004) states, this personal development will improve leadership development, even though it is not explicitly shown through actions. This leads me to think that feedback through the TLCP has had an effect on all the participants.

5.4.1 The Developmental Experience through the Video Assignment

Through the information made available by receiving feedback, they were to complete a video assignment showing an area for potential development. They all completed this assignment quite differently. An interesting aspect here is that I see a pattern or clear line between how they chose to make their videos and to what extent they chose to work with their personal development. By this I mean that there were contextual similarities between the way they chose to frame the video, and the outcome they achieved. Reasons for this could be that they were more or less motivated by the course and the assignment, or that this video was the beginning of their development.

In Peter's video, he had a conversation with one of his colleagues who had given him feedback for the TLCP report. Peter had reached out and asked for his help, and they discussed Peter's limitations and his potential for growth. I find this similar to how Peter chose to reflect on his own development and figure out which actions he had to take in order to develop. Uma made a creative video where she was speaking up and sharing her ideas with her leader and other colleagues. She did this as a way of practicing before facing similar situations at work. Gabrielle needed to process the shocking result and gain new insight in order to move on. It could seem that this video was her first step to reach this goal, because she reflected on her emotions and the actions she wished to develop (Goleman, 2014). She used the feedback she received and made a reflective video where she analysed herself and how she is viewed by others. John on the other hand, had few thoughts on further development after the course. His video was of a humoristic character with aspects of a more mature version of himself many years later. He admitted this was to take the focus of his development at the moment. Taken these differences into account, I would say that the way they chose to complete this task, shows something about where they were and where they wanted to go next. This way, feedback assignments like this one can be a helpful tool in order to encourage further development.

5.4.2 Developmental Actions as a Result of Receiving Feedback

The experience of feedback has explicitly led three of my participants to see through new actions at their work, as I presented in section 4.4.2. Between the second and third seminar, Gabrielle, Peter and Uma had spent much time reflecting on what they needed to work on. This can be seen in relation to what Clark (2013) and Weitzel (2007) mention about how specific feedback motivates to begin, continue or stop certain behaviours. As a direct result of the feedback she received, Gabrielle started thinking about how she behaves towards others, and slowly started adjusting her behaviour. She had said that “it was not the actual TLCP that gave me this insight, it was what comes after; how to deal with the feedback and what to do to become a better leader.” From this statement, I see how the TLCP alone has little use if it does not provoke them to start their own development. It rather makes feedback tools a strategy for this development and how to deal with it. Peter and Uma had seemed very inspired to work with the feedback they received, and had already done several measures when I met them for our interview. As an overall impression, Peter was determined to learn more about how he relates to his colleagues, and Uma practiced speaking up and sharing her opinions during meetings. Peter also shared: “I think I am closer to my colleagues now,” during the last course session. From this I see optimism and that the feedback has helped him to make some active changes. All the participants referred to how it takes time to adjust actions. It seems that they acknowledged how leadership development is an ongoing process with continuous potential (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). This makes the feedback from the leadership course only the beginning of their development.

John has been a character that has stood out from the others in many ways by how he reacted to and reflected on the TLCP. I would therefore like to focus the next paragraph on discussing his case alone. Although he had started out by saying he wanted to use this leadership course in order to develop, the result was that he chose not to focus on any parts in particular. For Johns,’ it could seem like timing had an effect on his decision, which Buron and Mann (2011) say affects the way feedback is received. The reason could be that he had received feedback through TLCP earlier, and felt demotivated going through everything one more time. Supporting this is that he told me he had gotten more out of it the previous time he completed TLCP. This could mean that feedback tools like this one loses some effect if it is used too often. Another reason could be that the results were in his favour, confirming his hopes for a positive development from last time. This could have enabled him to see new reasons for further development, as he had already “developed enough,” or it could have been that he was just very relieved to see that he was making progress. Also, he had just received extensive feedback at his work, which might have resulted in an overload of feedback information for John. Earlier during the leadership course, John mentioned that he wanted to reflect on why he had gotten the feedback he had. He reflected on this, even though it did not result in any changes in behaviour or new goals for him. He had also stated: “I feel that I rather develop continuously as a leader by receiving feedback every day. I don’t need to make some huge changes at the moment.” It seems that John was aware of where he was as a leader, and felt no sudden urge to change this at the moment. There can be many reasons for why this is so. He could be happy with the level he is at, and feel that it is sufficient enough to do his job for now. Another factor is that his reflective capacity at the moment enables him from reaching a higher level. According to Joiner and Josephs (2007), reflective action is needed in order to grow into a new level of leadership. Maybe for John, defining new goals and understanding more of his potential could help him develop further (Kirkland & Manoogian, 1998).

The overall goal of receiving feedback, is that destructive behaviour can be altered to become more efficient for the individual and the people working for them (S. Clark, 2013; Hacker, 2003; Van Dierendonck et al., 2004; Weitzel, 2007). Alterations to behaviours are important in order to grow (Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Jordan, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Taking this into account, feedback can seem pointless if nothing comes out of it. On the other hand, feedback can start reflective processes that can have an effect at a later time. This could be the case for John. I would therefore be careful stating that feedback is useless when no visible changes are made. It might just mean that the feedback process needs more time.

Taking this into account, it seems that receiving feedback through the leadership course has had an impact in order to increase the participants’ reflective judgement at different levels.

5.5 My Heuristic Perspective of Receiving Feedback

“When I have experienced myself how important it is to express my emotions and experiences when meeting another person, I will also better understand how important it is to facilitate and stimulate similar processes for others” (Kvalsund & Meyer, 2005, p. 160).

Until now I have focused on the participants’ subjective experience with feedback. For the last part of the discussion, I will bring in my personal experience regarding feedback, and see it in relation to what I have previously discussed. Personal experiences will increase self-awareness and make you a better counsellor when guiding others through similar processes (Brown, 2009; Clarkson & Cavicchia, 2014; Kvalsund & Meyer, 2005). Moustakas (1990) states that a researcher's experience is equally important and just as valid as the research participants' experience. I completed the TLCP and had my debriefing session in the same way as the participants did. This was to better understand what the leaders had been going through. Kvalsund and Meyer (2005) refer to this as a 'felt experience,' which is a way of really understanding the phenomenon that you will help your clients with. Although I have not directly tested my counselling skills after this case-study, I have reflected on the felt experience of feedback and how it has affected me.

Through my experience with receiving feedback, there are several elements that I find quite similar to those of the research participants. I also had a feeling of anxious excitement before I received my report. From my personal reflection notes before receiving the report, I had written: "antsy, excited, nervous, wonder how others view me." From this I see that receiving feedback will likely trigger an emotional reaction of anticipation, regardless of preparation and previous experience.

Reading my report, I also noticed the gap between how I view myself and how others view me. This, in addition to the high result on my reactive tendencies, was the main focus during my debrief. Seeing this in comparison to the participants, I noticed that focusing on the constructive feedback is often the first priority, as this is where you are granted with the most information for improvement. Like the participants, I also showed signs of defence mechanisms, and one of my initial reactions that I wrote down after reading my report, was "they must mistake my integrity for arrogance, because my values are everything to me." I started to think about how I am perceived, and just like Gabrielle I was focused on what my actual intentions are instead of how they are viewed by others. We all tried to justify or prove to the coach what the gap could mean. Our protective behaviour and self-deception could have been the immediate reaction of resisting our developmental process (Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Jordan, 2011; Rooke & Torbert, 2005), or the feeling of vulnerability or embarrassment, as we learnt how we were viewed by others (Reams & Reams, 2015). This experience suggests that an initial reaction to receiving feedback can be to explain the result to yourself and others.

Although I was surprised by some of the results from my TLCP, I was not completely shocked like Gabrielle, but had similar reactions to what Peter and Uma had in terms of surprise. I had also expected there to be some aspects that would surprise me, since feedback sessions during the counselling studies had revealed this earlier. I think that the amount of feedback and group counselling we have had during the master degree helped me avoid this shock, as the previous TLCP and continuous feedback at work had helped John. This leads me to believe that being exposed to feedback will eventually make the emotional impact easier to deal with. However, emotions like disappointment, surprise, relief and the will to become better still dominated my experience. I see how receiving feedback is an ongoing process that continuously will reveal new aspects, and can therefore also easily trigger emotional reactions at any time during one's own development.

It is important to notice that I received my report after observing all four participants during their debriefs. By this time, I was well aware of the structure of the debrief and typical questions that would come up. This prepared me for the debrief in a way that the participants were not able to, and it is likely that this experience was somewhat different for me than for them. However, each debrief is different, focusing on the personal aspect of the TLCP results. Although I might have been better prepared for the debrief session, my main focus was the same as the participants': understanding my report, dealing with the feedback and examining how I can develop as a leader.

With this I will move on to the conclusion, where I will sum up the key notions I have found through this research project.

6.0 Conclusion

We are not very good at evaluating ourselves or seeing ourselves as others see us.
(Yammarino & Atwater, 1997, p. 37)

Through a qualitative case study design, I have examined the research question: ***"How are leaders in an academic leadership course affected by the experience of receiving feedback?"*** The answer to this research question came from a group of four participants, which according to Postholm (2010) is sufficient in qualitative research studies. The question has been discussed and explored through interviews, observations, video presentations, reflective essays and 'felt experience' i.e. personal experience. I researched and participated in a leadership course over four months, where leaders from different organizations and businesses in Norway completed a 360-degree feedback assessment tool called The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP). Through this, leaders were meant to gain new insight into how others view them and their leadership in comparison to how the leaders view themselves. The intention of this study has been to understand this experience of receiving feedback. I have tried to grasp this subjective experience of leaders receiving feedback, and see this in relation to my own experience with the same phenomenon.

6.1 Concluding comments

Throughout this process, I have found that intentions might not be visible through actions. By this I mean that leaders can perceive themselves a certain way, and think that they have certain qualities, but this might not be explicit for those around. I have learnt that how colleagues interpret their leader and the leader's intentions are views that grant different perspectives on the same phenomena (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). Leadership behaviour affects how colleagues behave in response to the leader, so the actions have a bigger impact on the colleagues than the leaders' intentions ever do.

The leaders in this study stated that they were open and prepared for constructive feedback at all times. The actual experience of receiving the TLCP report was at first dominated by denial or other defence mechanisms (Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Jordan, 2011; Nesbit, 2012; Rooke & Torbert, 2005), but as they went through the process, more reflective thoughts and actions came out of it. From this I see that what they perceive and say about feedback in advance does not necessarily correspond with their reactions and how they are affected by the experience.

What surprised me most in my findings, is how challenging it is to see yourself through others' eyes. It demands a high level of reflective judgement (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). My hypothesis was that working leaders would have a better understanding of how they are perceived by their colleagues, but the TLCP results showed a distinct difference between how they viewed themselves and how others viewed them (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). This gap resulted in emotional reactions like disappointment, surprise, relief and shock. I saw how the extent of these reactions were affected by the leaders' previous experience with feedback, as those who were more used to receiving feedback were better prepared for the experience.

I have discovered that the experience after receiving feedback affected the leaders in different ways. The overall judgement is that the feedback started a reflective process within them. I have seen that leaders need to understand how their actions can affect others in order to develop (Barner, 2011; Yammarino & Atwater, 1997). They started to understand themselves better, by viewing their leadership from different perspectives. They also agreed that what they had learnt during this leadership course would need time to sink in, and that it hopefully would still have an effect on them in years to come. I therefore see the experience of feedback to be an ongoing process within the individual.

I found that although the result of receiving feedback varied, it helped the leaders make a conscious choice of what to do with this information. Most of the leaders were encouraged to work with their potential and adjust current behaviour as a result of this feedback. But as noted above, it took them some help and a process to get to this point.

As it has been discussed in this thesis, a conclusion can be that leaders tend to view themselves differently than how others view them. I would like to refer back the quote that opened this chapter: "We are not very good at evaluating ourselves or seeing ourselves as others see us" (Yammarino & Atwater, 1997, p. 37), and how realizing this leads to emotional reactions that affects how leaders can experience feedback. Actively seeking constructive feedback can hopefully be a way of closing this gap, and create an awareness between the intention behind actions and behaviour, and how these actions and behaviours are perceived by others.

6.2 Personal Comments and Relevance to the Study

By being personally involved, I have had first-hand experiences with the same issues that the leaders experienced. My overall goal with this approach was to look at the case from many different perspectives, and to discover something within myself. After the leadership course, I have thought extensively about how others might view my leadership skills, and how my actions affect different situations. I have discovered many of the same elements as my research participants, like the emotional impact of feedback and the gap between my own and other's view of myself. We needed the feedback from the TLCP in order to start our reflective processes and try understanding why we are viewed the way we are. By engaging in this heuristic inquiry, I have understood the element of experience at a new level. This has also prepared me for the role as a counsellor, as I have personal experience with an issue that I likely will address during my career (Kvalsund & Meyer, 2005).

I started writing this thesis because I wanted to learn more about feedback. I had earlier learnt the importance of giving and receiving feedback, but I gave no focus on how it can affect those who receive it. As a counsellor to-be, I have seen the importance of the ability to facilitate feedback, and receive constructive feedback in order to continuously learn and develop. I hope that learning more about this will help me become better prepared the next time someone presents me with feedback.

Finishing this thesis, I have learnt that the emotional impact of feedback is present at any age and profession. Regardless of one's background, development is a conscious choice that begins with self-reflection. I hope that I can integrate this knowledge in my profession as a counsellor, as well as my personal life.

6.1 Limitations of this Study and Implications for Further Research

Working with an extensive case like this one, I quickly realized that this thesis would only manage to grasp a small part of the experience leaders have with receiving feedback. It has been a valuable learning process, and as I look back at it now, I find new realizations for this study that I did not see before. Since this is a qualitative research project, the process I have had could likely have turned out differently for another researcher (Thagaard, 2003). The experience of feedback is subjective, and although I have drawn some lines and seen similarities, the felt experience can vary from person to person and from situation to situation. A limitation to my study that can have affected my results, is that the participants could have found it difficult to express and formulate their perspectives on their own experience and reflective processes as it forces them to describe complex situations.

To heighten the transferability of this study, I could have studied several leadership courses using TLCP, but because of time and resources this would not have been possible for this master thesis. A holistic approach where I would have researched all the main elements of the leadership course could have been very interesting in order to grasp the severity of the entire case, but this would have resulted in a too wide amount of data for my case (Creswell, 1998). I chose feedback as a theme in advance of conducting the study, making it an instrumental case study (Creswell, 1998). Another interesting approach would have been to participate in the course first, and then choose the theme for my thesis. This could have opened up for many different research themes.

For further research, it would have been interesting to conduct new interviews with the participants in a few months' time, to explore whether the feedback they received has emerged into long term developmental processes, instead of a short term change right after the course (Day & Dragoni, 2015). It could also have been interesting to research the experience of receiving feedback through similar leadership courses, and compare it to the results of this study.

7.0 Literature

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Appendix A – The Interview Guide English

Interview guide

1. Starting with an open introduction about the informant, their work and their leadership role.

2. What feelings were going on in you before receiving the feedback?

    a. Any particular feelings that emerged?
    b. Were you excited, scared, looking forward to it or did not think much about it

(a and b are simply for follow-up questions in case they do not already give this kind of information and need more prompting)

3. Now I wonder about how it was for you to read the TLC report you received

    a. What did you notice first?
    b. Did you notice anything in particular about yourself?
    c. Were you surprised about anything?

4. How did you feel during the actual debriefing session (feedback session)?

    a. Can you recall your immediate reaction?
    b. Which emotions arose?
    c. How did you feel towards the end of the session?

5. What did your video do for your feelings towards feedback?

6. What are your thoughts and perspectives on receiving feedback?

    a. Did you learn anything about receiving feedback through TLC that you have not reflected on earlier?
    b. What was this experience like for you?

7. Do you wish to add anything?

Thank you

Appendix B – The Interview Guide Norwegian

Intervju guide

1. Begynner med en åpen introduksjon om informantene, arbeidsoppgaver og lederrolle

2. Hvilke følelser oppstod hos deg før du mottok tilbakemeldinger på lederkurset?

    a. Noen spesifikke følelser du kan utdype?

    b. Var du spent, redd, gledet deg eller tenkte du ikke så mye på det?

3. Nå lurer jeg på hvordan det var for deg å lese gjennom TLC rapporten din?

    a. Hva la du merke til først?

    b. Var det noe spesielt ved deg selv du la merke til?

    c. Var du overrasket over noe?

4. Hvordan føltes deg for deg under tilbakelesningen du mottok?

    a. Hvilke følelser oppstod?

    b. Husker du din umiddelbare reaksjon?

    c. Hvordan følte du deg mot slutten av tilbakelesningen?

5. Hvilke tanker gjør du deg knyttet til tilbakemeldingene du fikk på videoen din?

6. Hva er ditt syn på å motta tilbakemeldinger?

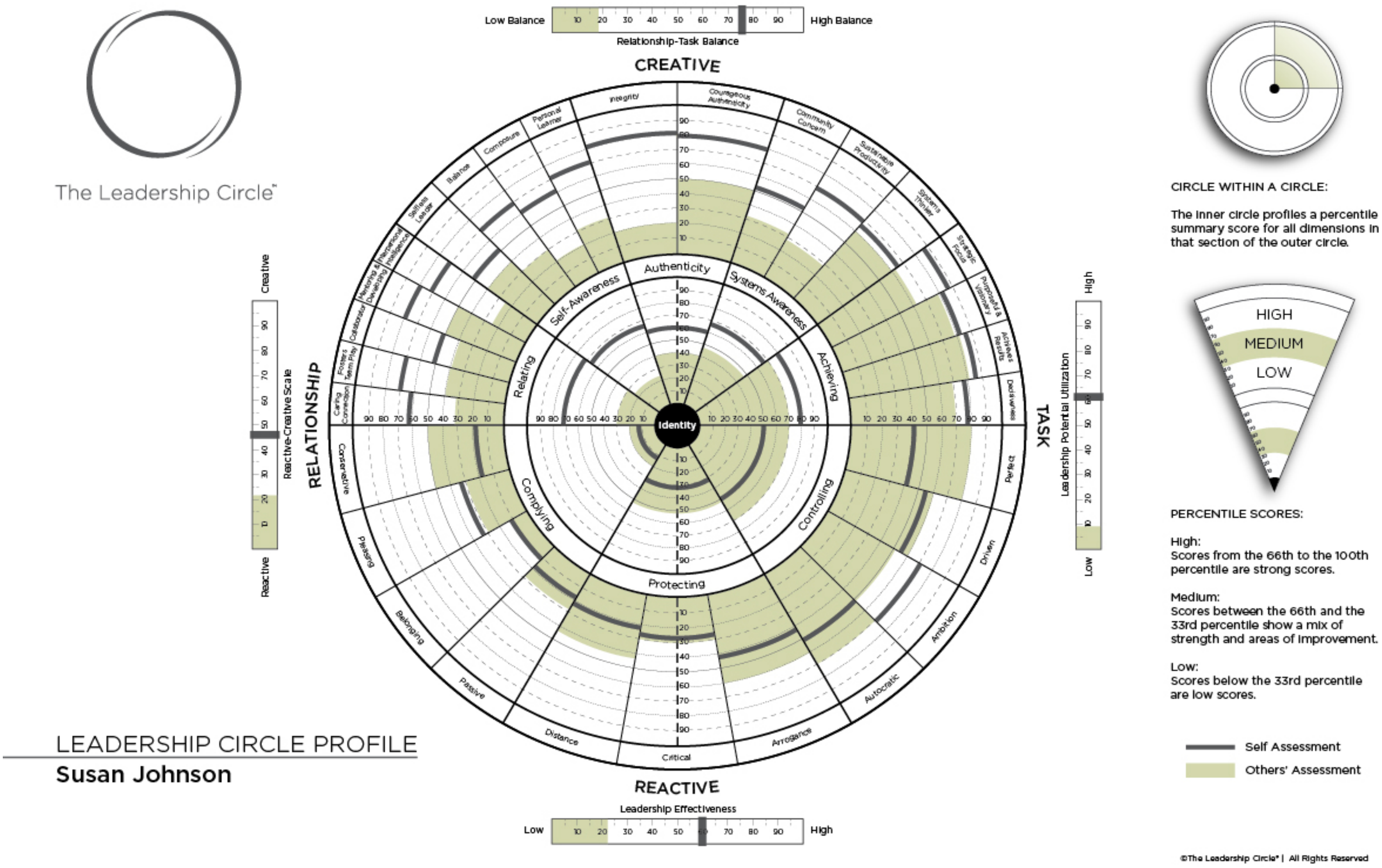
    a. Lærte du noe om å motta tilbakemeldinger gjennom dette verktøyet som du har har reflektert over tidligere?

    b. Hvordan var denne opplevelsen for deg?

7. Ønsker du å legge til noe?

Tusen takk!

Appendix C – The Leadership Circle Profile



An example of a TLCP report.

The upper half shows the creative competencies, while the lower half shows the reactive tendencies. The green markings show how others have rated the person within each of the dimensions. The black line shows how the person's self-ratings. The inner circle profiles a percentile summary score for all dimensions in that section of the outer circle.

Scores from the 66th to the 100th percentile are high scores, scores between the 66th and the 33rd percentile show a mix of strength and area for improvement, and scores below the 33rd percentile are low scores.

This picture can be found on The Leadership Circle website: https://leadershipcircle.com/assessment-tools/profile/

Appendix D – Information Letter to the Research Participants

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

Masteroppgave om ledelse og tilbakemeldinger

Bakgrunn og formål

Dette semesteret skal jeg skrive en masteroppgave i rådgivningsvitenskap ved NTNU. I den forbindelse skal jeg fordype meg i et prosjekt og en problemstilling hvor jeg skal undersøke et fenomen sett i lys av et teoretisk rammeverk. Jeg ønsker å undersøke hvordan det oppleves å motta tilbakemeldinger gjennom verktøyet "The Leadership Circle Profile" (TLCP), slik at jeg kan få et innblikk i hvordan ledere kan oppleve å motta tilbakemeldinger fra sine ansatte. Oppgaven vil ferdigstilles i løpet av juni 2016. Dere blir spurt om å delta i studien fordi dere har ulike bakgrunner som ledere som skal delta på et lederkurs og motta tilbakemeldinger gjennom verktøyet TLCP.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Studiet vil innebære observasjon av kommunikasjon og oppgaver i løpet av kurset, samt mulige oppfølgingsintervjuer i etterkant av tilbakemeldingsrundene. Det er helt greit å melde seg av enten observasjon, tilgang til dokumenter, intervju eller alle delene. Da vil ingen opplysninger om deg bli med i studien. Data vil registres som notater og lydopptak.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Det er kun veileder og student som har tilgang til personopplysningene, og alle vil kodes med et fiktivt navn og bakgrunn. Direkte personopplysninger vil ikke bli lagret noe sted, og notater/lydopptak vil bli lagret på en passordbeskyttet mappe på en egen datamaskin som kun skal benyttes til masteroppgaven. Deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonen, men det er mulig dere innad i denne gruppa kan klare å gjenkjenne hverandre hvis dere leser oppgaven. Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i juni 2016, og da vil alle opplysninger, notater og opptak slettes og makuleres.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med student Ragnhild Fredheim (95297081/fredheim2409@gmail.com) eller veileder Jonathan Reams (jonathan.reams@svt.ntnu.no)

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta (kryss av ønsket alternativ)

Observasjon	☐
Intervju	☐
Dokumenter fra kurset	☐

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix E – Notification for the Processing of Personal Data from NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

NSD

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Jonathan Reams
Institutt for voksnes læring og rådgivningsvitenskap NTNU

7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 18.03.2016 Vår ref: 47306 / 3 / BGH Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 10.02.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

47306	*Hvordan ledere opplever å motta tilbakemeldinger fra sine ansatte*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Jonathan Reams*
Student	*Ragnhild Fredheim*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.06.2016, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Belinda Gloppen Helle

Kontaktperson: Belinda Gloppen Helle tlf: 55 58 28 74
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Avdelingskontorer / *District Offices*:
OSLO: NSD. Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
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