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# Personal development in Leader developmen

What affects personal development, and how does it infleunce participants of leader development courses

Master's thesis in Science in Counselling

Supervisor: Jonathan Reams

June 2023



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Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences  
Department of Education and Lifelong Learning



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## Abstract

The purpose of this master's thesis has been to uncover new knowledge about the personal development that participants in leader development courses experience. Leader development is a rapidly growing industry that generates billions of dollars each year. However, there is no clear answer on how to best perform leader development, and research primarily focuses on the positive aspects while often neglecting the negative ones. There is little knowledge about the actual effects that leader development has on leaders and organizational results, and organizations rarely evaluate the effect themselves. Therefore, it is difficult to establish clear results of such programs.

The thesis aims to investigate the personal development that participants experience and, in doing so, perhaps clarify some of the benefits that such a course can have for both leaders and organizations. At the same time, it examines some of the negative aspects that may be associated with such courses and what can prevent personal development. Relevant theory is presented on personal development and leader development, including Robert Kegan's constructivist development theory, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-observation, as well as hindrances to personal development and negative aspects of leader development.

The study used qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to investigate the research question: "*What affects personal development, and how does it influence participants of leader development courses*". Using a phenomenological approach, five interviews were conducted and analyzed through interpretive phenomenological analysis. Additionally, observations were made at two different leader development courses, and the observation notes supported the analysis of the interviews. The analysis led to three categories, each with three subcategories, which dealt with the participant's experience of the course, their reflections and thoughts, and motivation, theory, and exercises. The categories are: 1. Holding environment, 2. Realizations and Improvements, and 3. Understanding.

Overall, the findings explain the importance of a holding environment in such a course to have the opportunity to delve into the various things that lead to personal development. A process that can be scary and involves scrutinizing the self, which leads to discoveries and reflections that one may have kept hidden for a long time. In such circumstances, support and safety are important to dare to explore, share, and learn. At the same time, potential negative aspects of leader development are discussed, as well as factors that contribute to hindering personal development. These include motivation, willingness, and timing, as well as fear of negative side effects when sharing vulnerabilities.

The findings of the study offer valuable knowledge about leader development, what considerations both a participant and a course holder should take to create opportunities for growth, and the benefits of working on personal development for each individual out there.



## Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgavens formål har vært å avdekke ny kunnskap rundt den personlige utviklingen deltakere av lederutviklingskurs opplever.

Lederutvikling er en stadig voksende industri, som omsetter for milliarder av dollar hvert år. Likevel er det ikke noe svar på hvordan man best utfører lederutvikling, samtidig som forskningen i all hovedsak fokuserer på de positive sidene og ofte neglisjerer de negative. Det er lite kunnskap om de faktiske effektene lederutvikling har på ledere og organisasjoners resultater, samtidig som at organisasjoner sjelden evaluerer effekten selv. Derfor er det vanskelig å fastsette noen klare resultater av slike programmer.

Oppgaven sikter seg inn på å undersøke den personlige utviklingen deltakerne opplever, og på den måten kanskje klargjøre noen av fordelene ett slikt kurs kan ha for både ledere og organisasjoner. Samtidig undersøker den noen av de negative sidene som kan være koblet til slike kurs og også hva som kan forhindre en personlig utvikling.

Det presenteres relevant teori omkring personlig utvikling og lederutvikling, blant annet, Robert Kegans konstruktivistiske utviklingsteori, følelseskompetanse, selvinnsett, selvregulering og selvobservasjon, og både hindringer til personlig utvikling og negative sider ved lederutvikling.

Oppgaven benyttet kvalitativ metode, med både intervjuer og observasjoner, for å undersøke problemstillingen: «Hva påvirker personlig utvikling og hvordan påvirker det deltakere av lederutviklingskurs». Med en fenomenologisk tilnærming ble fem intervjuer gjennomført og analysert gjennom en fortolkende fenomenologisk analyse. I tillegg ble det gjennomført observasjoner på to ulike lederutviklingskurs, der observasjonsnotatene støttet opp under analysen av intervjuene. Analysen førte til tre kategorier, der alle hadde tre underkategorier, som omhandlet deltakernes opplevelse av kurset, deres refleksjoner og tanker, og motivasjon, teori og øvelser. Kategoriene er: 1. Holding environment, 2. Oppdagelser og Forbedringer, og 3. Forståelse

Overordnet forklarer funnene viktigheten med et holding environment i et slikt kurs for å ha muligheten til å gå inn på de ulike tingene som fører til personlig utvikling. En prosess som kan være skremmende, og innebærer granskning av selvet, og på den måten fører til oppdagelser og refleksjoner en kanskje har holdt skjult for seg selv i lang tid. I slike omstendigheter er støtte og trygghet viktig for å tørre og utforske og dele. Samtidig diskuteres det potensielle negative sider ved lederutvikling og hvilke faktorer som er med på å hindre personlig utvikling. Dette går på for eksempel motivasjon, villighet og timing, samt frykt for, negative sideeffekter dersom man deler sårbarheter.

Funnene i studien tilbyr verdifull kunnskap omkring lederutvikling, hvilke betraktninger både en deltaker, og en kursholder burde ta for å skape muligheter for vekst, og hvilke fordeler det å jobbe med personlig utvikling har for hvert individ der ute.





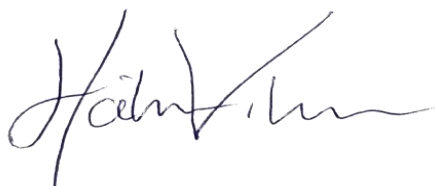
## Forord

To fine år på masterstudiet er over, og jeg skal ikke lengre være student. Denne oppgaven er en avslutning på min Mastergrad i Rådgivningsvitenskap ved NTNU Trondheim. Arbeidet med den har vært både spennende og interessant, og det har bydd på utfordringer og følelse av både mestring og feiling. Disse to årene har vært utrolig lærerike og jeg føler jeg har utviklet meg enormt på veldig kort tid. Jeg er utrolig glad for at jeg har gjennomført denne masteren.

Studiet har bestått av flere ulike emner, der ett spesielt fanget min interesse, nemlig Jonathans RAD3039, Organisasjonsrådgivning. Her fikk jeg servert nyttig teori, både faglig, men også for livet generelt og jeg fikk prøvd meg i rollen som coach for en leder. Jeg ble introdusert for blant annet Kegan, som virkelig fanget min interesse og som har gjort meg interessert i å både utvikle meg selv på en god måte, men også hjelpe andre å gjøre det samme. Jonathans engasjement og enorme kunnskap bidro også sterkt til min egen interesse.

Jeg ønsker derfor å takke veilederen min Jonathan Reams for gode tilbakemeldinger, samtaler og ikke minst engasjerende og spennende forelesninger som har ført meg i denne retningen, og for å la meg observere kurset RAD6505. Jonathan har vært en viktig person for både utdanningen i sin helhet, men også for denne oppgaven i seg selv. Jeg vil også rette en takk til alle ledere som har stilt som informanter i intervjuene, og alle deltakere i kursene som tillot meg å observere. En stor takk til AFF som tok meg imot med åpne armer og la til rette for at jeg kunne komme som observatør på kurset. Til slutt ønsker jeg også å takke familie, venner og klassekamerater for uvurderlig støtte og hjelp underveis i masterskrivingen, men også i hele studieløpet.

Dette hadde ikke vært mulig uten dere.



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# 1 Introduction

Leader development is a big field, and it is impossible to cover it all in a single master's thesis. I find it very interesting, and I have had several ideas about what to write about, starting off as a wish to make a model of leader development, investigating and comparing several courses. My supervisor told me to "get real" and specify my area of interest. In this chapter I will delimit the topic, I will explain my reasons for choosing leader development, present the problem statement and clarify some relevant terms linked to the thesis.

## 1.1 Personal background for choice of theme

The overall theme of this masters' project is leader development. I have chosen this subject on the basis of my own interest in leadership and how to lead others in a good way. I've had an interest in leadership for as long as I can remember, at least after a certain age. During my almost two years of studying my masters in Trondheim it has dawned on me how important personal development is in this area (at least in my opinion). Through both reading about it, and by working on it myself, through various exercises and coaching, I have realized the power of personal development. Therefore, I want to investigate personal development in leader development further.

I believe both me and everyone else can agree to having experienced both good and bad leaders, either in the workplace or in any other circumstances. The way a person handles the stress, people and the surroundings that follow the leader-role varies, and I don't think there are any conclusions as to what a perfect leader is, other than it depends on the situation. Nevertheless, I am certain that there are several necessities as a leader in the modern society when it comes to leadership. It is my opinion that characteristics related to personal development are often underestimated, in favor of, for example, the ability to solve work related tasks, financial understanding etc. Therefore, I want to enter the world of leader development and explore the personal aspects related to development, which is the background for the project's problems statement. These are my thoughts and opinions, but not something this thesis is set out to verify or test.

## 1.2 Problem statement

There are almost unlimited resources aimed at leadership, they all contribute to the understanding of leadership and how to act in the role as a leader. That does not mean that it is easy to become a leader, nor that you can read any leadership theory or book and become a great leader. That might be one of the reasons for the growing of the industry of leader development.

The projects problem statement sounds as follows:

*"What affects personal development, and how does it influence participants of leader development courses?"*

Leader development includes many aspects, this problem statement helps guide the thesis in a specific direction. The thesis' purpose is to uncover new knowledge about the experience of personal development amongst participants of leader development courses.

To gain new knowledge and be able to conclude, the research work and its results will be presented and discussed with relevant theory. The problem statement delimits the thesis. In the next section I will present these delimitations and I will clarify relevant terms.

## 1.3 Delimitation and clarification of terms

In such a big field as leadership, I have to limit the project to narrow it down and make it possible to sharpen its focus and go in depth in the area I want to explore. The terms leader, leader development and personal development are all vast, and a narrowing is required to keep the project on course in the thesis, and to meet the problem statement presented in a satisfying matter. In this section I will present relevant terms that I will use throughout the thesis.

### 1.3.1 Leadership

Leadership is a field that is heavily researched, and which has been evolving a lot through time. Leadership in itself is so complex and diverse that it makes it nearly impossible to find a simple and precise definition. It does not limit to one element, as leadership is practiced in many different ways, it changes with time and tradition, and it is influenced by location, situation, culture and context (Moxnes, 2019). Moxnes (2019) offers the traditional definition of leadership as; a process consisting of influencing people by generating goals, meaning, motivation and at the same time making sure that those goals are reached and improving the organization.

#### 1.3.1.1 Leadership theories

Three types of leadership styles are often put up against each other:

The term transformational leadership was introduced in 1978 and defined as "such leadership occurs when one or more persons *engage* with others in a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). This style of leadership could be summarized in short terms as a way of influencing, inspiring, stimulate and look after the employees to make sure the organizations goals are achieved. A transformative style is associated with delegation and autonomy, which gives employees the chance to learn and perform. The leader appeals to create an *outward mindset* (The Arbinger institute, 2019), and takes individual considerations, making it possible to identify needs, possibilities, and skills in every individual employee. (Braun, et al., 2013; Jiang & Chen, 2016)

Transactional leadership focuses on exchanging resources between leader and employee. This style prevents autonomy and could create distance between the organization's goals and the employees' goals. On the other hand, if the resources that are rewarded to the employee are good enough this might create an eagerness to do the tasks asked. It is a controlling style (Young, et al., 2020). It is important to remember the employee's motivation, which there are tons of theories covering (e.g., Maslow, Herzberg). I will not go into these terms, as they don't fit into the delimitation of this thesis.

Laissez-Fair leadership implies avoidance of a lot of leadership responsibilities by leaving the employees to themselves and not micro-managing along the way. This grants employees a lot of freedom and autonomy but distances the leader to the rest of both the employees, as well as the results (Bono & Judge, 2004).



Fundamental changes in modern organizational life have shaped the exigencies of leadership. The modern organization allows and even requires a creative dissonance in which competing initiatives and directions are given attention and resources. This requires distributed leadership. Leadership at many different levels and contexts. Leadership is no longer corresponding to formal managerial authorities in the postindustrial milieu, compared to traditional hierarchical organizations. Meaning that the relationship between leader and follower is more dependent, rather than a one-way street. Exerting influence over other, require high-level communication and interpersonal skills, and is a vital part of leadership. As Lee and King noted, "great leaders use their whole selves, infusing their work with their own multifaceted, complex character and personality". (Axelrod, 2012, p. 344).

### 1.3.2 Leadership- vs. leader development

Many are unaware of the difference between leadership development and leader development. Leader development could be considered as a part of the complex leadership development, with its focus on individual-based knowledge, skills and abilities, rather than focusing on social capital through building network and culture (Day, 2000). As Day (2000) states it, some of the specific types of intrapersonal competences learned in leader development includes self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. These competences contribute to enhanced individual knowledge, personal power, and trust, which have been proposed as the fundamental leadership imperatives. Leadership developments primary emphasis is on building and using interpersonal competence, which indicates the ability to understand people, building trust, respect and commitment (Day, 2000). Since this thesis aims to understand the personal development of individuals participating in these kinds of courses, I will use leader development throughout the text.

### 1.3.4 Holding environment

The holding environment is something that often is talked about in helping relations, such as therapists, coaching and in leader development. The term could be defined as the capacity to create a supportive emotional and/or physical space within which a client can work through and recover from affects that might be otherwise overwhelming (Downing & Lupton, 2021). To create a relationship where this holding environment can take place, there are several things to keep in mind. Flaherty's three parts of mutuality covers some of them, these includes mutual- trust, freedom of expression, and respect (Flaherty, 2022). These considerations will easier secure an environment where supportive challenges are accepted, and increase the chances of successfully working on a leader's self-awareness, communications skills etc.

### 1.3.5 Outward Mindset

Outward mindset is all about seeing others and help them. While inward-minded people *do* things, outward-minded people help others be able to do things (The Arbinger institute, 2019).

Mindset refers to the way people see and regard the world. It implies the way people see circumstances, challenges, opportunities, other people and also themselves. Failing to identify and change mindset can stall the change efforts of an entire organization. By

achieving an outward mindset, you no longer need to specify everything the team is supposed to do. As the mindset changes, the behavior does as well (The Arbinger Institute, 2019).

### 1.3.6 Vertical & lateral growth

A person may grow in two different ways, laterally and/or vertically. Lateral growth indicates gaining skills and ways of solving a problem, which may be done in an afternoon by reading a book or take a class. Vertical growth on the other hand takes longer and involves more than learning. It is a transformational change in your understanding and perspective of what you know, do, and who you are. For example, instead of learning how to handle a conflict, you learn the value of a conflict, your understanding of both yourself and others in the conflict evolves. The conflict becomes a challenge and an opportunity to grow, rather than something to avoid (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2016).

## 2 Theory

In this chapter, the thesis' theoretical groundings will be presented. Theory in the context of this thesis is linked to previously conducted research and theoretical perspectives. Leadership and leader development are big subjects, and I could have included a lot of different theories. The theory is therefore chosen based on my gathered data and the problem statement in an inductive approach. In this chapter I will present theory about personal development and leadership. I will also present relevant previously conducted research to give the theory context. Theory and research literature presented in this chapter will be discussed up against the findings presented later, in chapter 5.

### 2.1 Previously conducted research

I have chosen two articles in this literature review that will shed light on the thesis' problem statement, and that could contribute to the understanding of personal development in leader development. The first article study different ways of understanding leadership development, suggesting six different ways of understanding it, and different ways of conceptualizing leadership development (Kjellström, et al., 2020). The second article is about the propensity for self-development of leadership attributes, trying to understand the aspects of personal characteristics in leader development courses (Boyce, et al., 2010).

#### 2.1.1 Understanding leadership development

Kjellström, et al. (2020) wanted to investigate the different ways of understanding leadership development and its complexity. Their study resulted in six different ways of conceptualizing leadership development, these are self-development, personal development, human development, fulfilling a leadership role, leader and organizational development, and collective leadership development. Their results show the importance of the self in leadership development, also showing that there is not one clear understanding of what leadership development is. The core is that the program is designed to make someone a better leader, but the means of getting there are not set. Leadership development may therefore be adjusted and designed to fit the clients' needs, tailoring activities to best develop the leaders participating (Kjellström, et al., 2020).

The common factor in all of these conceptualizations is that they address the leader at a personal level to some degree, with a varied level of complexity. The first three I mentioned are perhaps those who address the individual to the highest degree. The first, self-development, refers to the development of the self, with little regard to leadership in general. The second, personal development, includes personal development in leader development, with a focus on the development within the role of a leader. The third, human development, takes a wider scope at leadership development than the organizations boundaries, by relating it to human development as an evolutionary process, from an individualistic standpoint in terms of leadership (Kjellström, et al., 2020).

### 2.1.2 Propensity for self-development

Boyce et al. (2010) addresses the lack of research on the personal characteristics of those who engage in leader self-development activities. Their work on junior military leaders led to a conceptual model in which dispositional characteristics differently predicted leader development activities. The characteristics found to be associated with leader development activities were career growth orientation (feedback seeking behavior), mastery orientation (openness to experience, intellectual maturity and, great self-efficacy), and work orientation (job involvement and organizational commitment). They found out that the individuals with a stronger career growth orientation were more skilled at performing self-development activities. The three orientations play a key role in leader self-development according to Boyce et al. (2010).

The authors refer to propensity for self-development as one's intention to perform activities designed to grow personal leadership capacity or frames of reference (Boyce et al., 2010). They consider skills and motivation as the two prime proximal indicators of one's propensity to perform leadership self-development, giving a structure to understand why certain individuals have a greater tendency to perform self-development.

The skills necessary for individuals to perform self-development can be described, according to Boyce et al. (2010), as a synergy between instructional technology and self-regulatory competencies. The instructional technological system provides context for identifying and framing the instructional skills vital for self-development. These skills include diagnosis learning needs, designing and setting goals of development, identifying the process of development, and evaluating the process of personal learning. Self-development involves applying these skills to developing a successful self-learning system that grows the needed leadership skill.

## 2.2 Constructivist-development theory

Constructivist-development theory is based on the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget but focuses on adult development. I will introduce Robert Kegan's theory as a representative of the constructivist-developmental theorists, also called neo-Piagetians. Constructive-development theory is a stage theory of adult development that focuses on a persons' understanding of the self and the world. The theory is developmental in the sense of how this meaning making grow more complex over time and the meaning is constructed through the way we interpret our experiences (McCauley, et al., 2006).

When Kegan (1982,1994) talks about how this meaning making develops throughout life, he describes the five orders of consciousness. The first two are mainly limited to early life, whereas the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> are more linked to adult development.

The developmental process is explained through a subject-object relationship, representing a distinction in the way we make sense of experiences. Kegan (1982,1994) describes objects as the part of our experience that we can reflect on, handle, take control of or be responsible for. While subjects are those elements of our knowing or organizing that we identify with, are tied to, or embedded in, and unable to reflect on. Since we are unaware of the subject part of our experiences, we may not question them or make decisions about them. When advancing in the development stages, what has been subject at one stage, becomes object at the next. This implies that by every stage a person advances, the more that person is able to take his or her own meaning making as an object of reflection.

The further one develops, the more complex their understanding of an experience becomes. The movement from one level to the next is spurred by limitations in their current way of constructing or making meaning of the experience. Facing complexity requires a more complex way to understand both yourself and the world. The developmental level therefore influences what each individual is aware of and subsequently affects what they can reflect upon and change. An increase in understanding within a level suggests lateral development, while growth from one level to the next indicates vertical development. (Harris & Kuhnert, 2007).

Most people reach level three in their early, to mid-twenties, (the socialized mind) in the cross-categorical stage of development according to Kegan. At this point the individual can think hypothetically, construct ideas and values, and generalize. People at this level will perceive those who "offend against" their systems or values as offending them personally, possibly leading to defensive reactions (Pinkavova, 2010). The important things for a person at level three are the system surrounding them, things such as their family, norms, and beliefs shape the way they think and behave. Taking an external view of themselves and seek validation from others, caring more about what others think, rather than what is right or wrong (Daloisio, 2022).

The fourth stage of Kegan's theory is what he called "the self-authoring mind", characterized by the ability to systemic thinking, permitting reflections on relationships and creating distinctions within those relationships, reordering existing arrangements according to new values (Pinkavova, 2010). In this stage the person prioritizes defining who they are, moving away from being defined by other people, their environment, and relationships, making them able to distinguish others' opinions from their own, and believing in being independent from expectations of culture, with their own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. At this stage an internal sense of direction develops, and they get their own course, giving the person the ability to question their own beliefs and expectations and therefore stay strong to what they believe and to solve problems with their own sense of right and wrong. Individuals at the fourth stage are responsible for their own emotions, being clear about own's own feelings and are trying to regulate them, and at the same time they are able to see things from other's perspective. (Daloisio, 2022).

Most people are to be found somewhere between the third and fourth level, and very few reach the fifth. Kegan states that the few that reach the fifth level, never do it before their forties, and this might have something to do with age, or the fact that the more years a person goes through, the more opportunities they have to experience and react to change and transitions (Pinkavova, 2010). At this stage the person's "self" is not tethered to specific identities or roles but is regularly created through exploration of their identity. The self is ever evolving and in constant change, through interactions with others. At this stage both authority and themselves are questioned, and they recognize complexity in an attempt to truly understand and explore others perspectives objectively (Daloisio, 2022).

## 2.3 Leader development

Despite increased investments in leader development from businesses around the world, research yields no clear answers as to how to best conduct leader development, if leader development has any clear effect on the business, or if there are any economic benefits in leader development. There is neither any all-encompassing theory of leader development. (Dahler & Fjellvær, 2016).

Briefly explained, leader development is about developing leaders and leadership, both the individual leader, and the organizations as a whole (Dahler & Fjellvær, 2016). There is neither a single definition, nor a theory that could give a simple answer as to what good leader development is. Therefore, good leader development must be seen and evaluated against what we consider as good leadership of people, as well as good organizing and design of work within the organization (Dahler & Fjellvær, 2016). As stated in chapter one, Day (2000) talks about leader development as human capital focused and about learning intrapersonal competences, including self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation.

## 2.4 Personal aspects of Leader development

Human development involves a complex set of processes; therefore, it is impossible to find a "correct" method of conducting leader development. The process of developing a leader is a process that includes more than simply deciding what leadership theory to be used (Day, et al., 2014).

There are many different leader development programs, and some of them address the individuals attending, rather than only being task and competency focused. This includes emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-observation, self-reflection, feedback, amongst others, which all contribute to their personal development and vertical growth.

Fundamental changes in modern organizational life have shaped the exigencies of leadership. The modern organization allows and even requires a creative dissonance in which competing initiatives and directions are given attention and resources. This requires distributed leadership. Leadership at many different levels and contexts. Leadership is no longer corresponding to formal managerial authorities in the postindustrial milieu, compared to traditional hierarchical organizations, meaning that the relationship between leader and follower is more dependent, rather than a one-way street. Exerting influence over others requires high-level communication and interpersonal skills and is a vital part of leadership. (Axelrod, 2012). Lee, King, and Altman (2001 p. 71) noted, "great managers use their whole selves, infusing their work with their own multifaceted, complex character and personality".

### 2.4.1 Self-awareness

High self-awareness is claimed to lead to better decision making, team performance and authentic leadership (Carden, et al., 2022). Carden et al. (2022) also talk about self-awareness as something that predicts leadership performance and success, and that it has been voted as the most important trait that leaders could acquire in a survey at Stanford Business School. Even though self-awareness seemingly offers many positives, it is hard to find an agreed upon definition of the term that includes the complexity of the term in theories. Merriam-Webster however, defined self-awareness in a simple way as the "awareness of one's own personality or individuality" (Axelrod, 2012, p. 341).

Axelrod (2012) states that self-awareness has been increasingly important after the evolution of modern organizations. Processes that foster self-integration and self-alignment contribute to leadership growth, increasing the degree of harmony and decreasing the amount of internal conflict among the leaders' interpersonal style, values, and goals becomes means of increasing leadership effectiveness. This internal alignment

becomes evident in the leader's capacity to pursue a direction with energy, purpose, integrity, and commitment. The more the leader's self is seen as a powerful tool of influence, the more critical it is to understand how their behavior and personality impact others, either positively or negatively. This gives self-awareness two dynamically corresponding dimensions. An accurate understanding of one's own strengths and weaknesses, and knowledge of how one's own behavior is likely to impact others.

Self-awareness is a vital foundational skill for three emotional intelligence competencies – accurate self-assessment, emotional awareness, and self-confidence. Accurate self-assessment is crucial for a leader's success, in that a willingness to acknowledge one's own weaknesses and shortcomings makes it more likely that they can change and improve to better meet challenges. Awareness of how our emotions affect us is the fundamental emotional competency (Axelrod, 2012).

## 2.4.2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) could be defined as the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking, including the ability to accurately perceive emotions, access and generate emotions to assist thought, understand emotions and emotional knowledge. EI could also be perceived as the ability to regulate emotions reflectively to prompt intellectual and emotional growth (Sadri, 2012). As Sadri (2012) states, this includes perceiving emotions through recognition of for example facial expression or body language, and interpreting what they mean, and to use emotions to facilitate thought, through weighing conflicting emotions up against each other to determine how to act. EI offers the opportunity to understanding emotions by labeling them and understanding the relationships associated with shifts in emotion, and to be able to manage emotion, effectively manage feelings, within oneself and others, by for example calming down after being angry or ease the anxiety of another person.

Emotional awareness gives the leader important tools for reading highly complex situations in organizations, and for being able to influence others, not only being influenced by others. EI is essential for self-control, which is a challenge in a high-tempo, high-stress situation a leader often finds themselves. Knowing your feelings and making use of them, makes it less likely to be ruled by them (Axelrod, 2012).

The foundation of emotional competence is to have knowledge about feelings, and to have the skills to handle feelings. This indicates an understanding of how emotional reactions indicate psychological needs, both in oneself, and in others. It means that we are able to react adequately to ours and others' feelings, welcoming feelings, validate, and acknowledge them. A good understanding of feelings is essential for handling feelings, meaning that we have the language to describe feelings we notice in ourselves and in others, and that we realize which needs those feelings signal (Klomstén & Fikse, 2021). Psychologists Tomkins (1964), Izard (1971), and Ekman (1971) tested people's ability to recognize feelings by their facial expression by showing photos of actors trying to show different feelings. People were consistently able to match the feelings with the right pictures/facial expressions. The study has, however, been proven wrong in newer research. The newer research showed that people are using all their life experience, together with the full context around the facial expression, in an interpretation of the feeling, and therefore basing their answer on more than the facial expression alone. E.g., people thought a person was in disgust, because he was holding a dirt diaper, when in fact the face in the photo was grafted from an angry person (Barrett, 2017). At the same time, Brené Brown's study of over 7000 people showed that people are only able to mention

three emotions when asked, happy, sad, and angry, showing the lack of vocabulary people have when it comes to feelings (ABC news, 2021).

Klomstén and Fikse (2021) describe the benefits of being able to regulate feelings, giving the possibility to function optimally and appropriately in a given situation, when solving difficulties or adapting to our surroundings. To regulate feelings could mean to stay calm even though a person is angry or annoyed, or that one has the ability to talk about difficult things without letting their emotions get the better of them. It is also about the ability to handle stress, knowing about our feelings and what triggers them, giving the opportunity to understand how we are affected, and therefore the ability to regulate behavior to handle situations the best way possible.

To be aware of emotions and handle them is important, as they sink in beneath the level of our awareness and nibble away at our well-being if we try to ignore them. They may pop up at inappropriate times or get dumped on people we don't really want to hurt, they may lower our level of energy and joy so that we operate out of a narrow band of blandness and mediocrity (Brown, 2009).

### 2.4.3 Self-reflection and self-observation

In the action-oriented world of leaders, time out for reflection and contemplation is an opportunity to regain balance and pursue growth. The speed and action emphasis, and the focus on quick results, as well as the number of interactions a leader has in everyday life, compromise the leader's ability to sort out feelings and thoughts (Axelrod, 2012).

Freud (1900) and Richard Sterba (1934) both described what we know as self-observation in respectively *the interpretation of dreams*, with free association, and in the ego-psychological understanding. This meaning the un-reflective part of just looking inside and isolating aspects of themselves from what is going on, and looking for the source of their behavior, resulting in being both the observer and the observed. Self-reflection happens when one starts to reflect on those things observed. It is a conscious mental process, including thinking, reasoning, and examining one's own thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Self-reflection could be done alone, inside one's head, or it could be facilitated in other ways, e.g., diaries, thinking out loud, or exercises addressing one's thoughts and feelings. Using things such as words and pictures grants the opportunity to look at those reflections at a later date (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012).

## 2.5 Feedback

Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe feedback as information provided by an agent (e.g., peer, course holder, teacher, self) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. Feedback is a "consequence" of performance. To facilitate an understanding, it is useful to consider a continuum of feedback and instructions, combining feedback with a more correctional review, intertwining the instructions and feedback until the process takes on the form of new instructions, rather than informing someone solely about correctness (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Accurate self-assessment could be achieved through feedback and is key to realize one's strengths and weaknesses (Axelrod, 2012). Carol Dweck (2006) describes people with a fixed mindset, versus people with a growth mindset, where those with a fixed mindset tend to easily fall back on defense mechanisms, ignore constructive feedback, and feel



threatened by others' success. Leading to achieving less than one's potential. People with fixed mindsets like that could have bigger issues achieving personal development, and at the same time be difficult to work with.

Both positive and negative feedback can have beneficial effects on learning. The effect of feedback relies more on the level of the feedback and how it is processed, rather than it being either positive or negative. Negative feedback is more powerful than positive when it is aimed at the "self". Individuals tend to try and confirm their self-perception by attending most to feedback that fits their view of the self and by trying to arrange their environment to acquire further self-confirming evidence. Positive feedback can increase the likelihood that people return to or persist in an activity and self-report higher interest in that activity (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

There are different ways of designing feedback, one of them is through 360-feedback. 360-feedback can confront the leader with strengths that have been taken for granted, as well as weaknesses that have been disavowed. An accurate assessment of one's strengths could be just as important for growth as the awareness of one's limitations (Axelrod, 2012).

## 2.6 The dark side of leader development

Leader development is big business worldwide with current turnover billions of dollars every year, being organizations most expensive development cost. Yet most of the research focuses on the positive sides of leader development. The research mostly aims at all the different benefits it could have, neglecting possible negative aspects. Arnulf et al. (2016) explored the negatives of leader development in their study "the dark side of leadership development", studying the effects on both participants and facilitators, claiming that the negatives are hard to get a hold of in evaluations of the different programs.

Arnulf et al. (2016) state that leader development refers to a number of different activities, and that the actual effect these activities have on leaders and organizational results are yet to be confirmed. Other studies show that this effect rarely is evaluated by the organizations, making it difficult to determine any persistent results of the programs. When asking leaders about their experience with leader development, they found that 67 percent found it to be inefficient and a waste of time. As much as 37 percent reported that they experienced direct negative consequences, while 13 percent said that it had a negative effect on their private life and mental health.

Further Arnulf et al. (2016) claim that leader development may have a positive, negative, or no effect at all. They claim that leaders often find it difficult to say no to an invitation to such a program as they often signal career opportunities. Revealing personal aspects of their lives, and committing to the process, as they are often asked to do, may lead to negative consequences if it is done in a bad way. Other participants, employers, consultants or others could use that personal information in ways that go against their interests and/or violate their personal integrity. The authors of the study clarify that leader development programs could give unwanted side effects. Vulnerable and personal sides of a person could be reviled, without offering any ways of getting out of the situation, feeling forced to share, ultimately creating consequences later on. These experiences have no effect on learning, but rather gives feelings of loss of control and shame (Arnulf et al., 2016).

## 2.7 Hindrances to self-growth

Kegan suggests that development change is inherently stressful. From a constructive/developmental perspective, it is all about losing one's current identity or way of making meaning in the process of constructing new identity (Lewis, 2011). Or as Kegan suggested, one must lose one's mind on the way to gaining a new mind. Dr. Stan Hyman (2023) states the top ten barriers to self-growth as such: Fear, denial, pride, defensiveness, not taking responsibility, lack of self-discipline, lack of motivation, lack of goal, negative attitude, and lack of support.

When someone is feeling depressed or anxious, our natural response as friend, course holder, therapist etc. is to try and do something to help that person overcome their distress and return to their former sense of well-being. Viewed from a constructive-developmental perspective, this may be the wrong thing to do. By only focusing on relieving the persons distress, we are in effect aligning ourselves with a familiar but increasingly outworn self, a self that, at least initially, views that distress as a "not me" experience. By only focusing on mending their distress we fail to "hold" a larger person who is in the process of becoming someone who will soon be able to make sense of themselves and their life experiences in a new and more articulated manner. Instead, we should help them own their distress as a natural part of a significant development transition. When we manage to tolerate another's distress and be "good company" during developmental transition, we are giving a far greater gift than temporarily relieving them of their distress, in the long run (Lewis, 2011).

Other aspects that could hinder development are hidden competing commitments within the individual. The process of identifying and working on this "immunity to change" can be painful and embarrassing. It challenges the psychological foundations upon which people function. They are asked to call into question beliefs they have long held close, revealing feelings that they would not ordinarily disclose to others, perhaps not even to themselves. Some people opt to continue their struggle against hidden competing commitments, because it is so difficult to move through the process (Kegan & Lahey, 2001).

Further Kegan and Lahey (2001) explain competing commitments as subconscious, hidden goals that conflict with the stated commitments. These competing commitments make people personally immune to change.

This chapter has presented relevant theories, connected to the thesis' problem statement and its findings that will be presented in chapter 4. The theories are presented to give a better understanding of the main subjects of this thesis, including personal development, leadership, leader development, emotions, and self-awareness. The theory presented will be used in the discussion together with the findings. The next chapter will present the method used to gather data, analyze it, and secure the quality of the study.

## 3 Method

In social science research, method is typically divided into two different paradigms to gather information about society and how to analyze it, qualitative and quantitative (Tjora, 2011). Scientific methods could in other words be described as those tools used to gather information about the topic of the study.

This chapter consists of descriptions of the methodology I used and the scientific theory relevant to it, as well as a justification of my choices. The choices are linked with data gathering, analysis and interpretation of the data, at last, I will present reflections about ethics and the thesis' quality. The methodology is linked with the thesis' earlier presented problem statement: "What affects personal development, and how does it influence participants of leader development courses."

### 3.1 Qualitative Method

Qualitative research differs from quantitative by focusing on understanding phenomenon, rather than explaining them, a closeness to those we are researching with an open interaction between researcher and informant, text rather than numbers and seeking people's experiences and meanings (Tjora, 2011). A singular brief definition of qualitative method might be too narrow and exclude one discipline or another, while a broad definition might be uselessly global. Therefore there are five features of qualitative research one might consider instead of one definition (Yin, 2011). As Yin (2011, p. 7-9) states, these five features are to study peoples' lives and their lifeworld, representing the informants' perspectives of life, covering the contextual conditions within the informants' lives, contributing insight into existing or emerging theories or concepts that could help explain human social behavior, and at last, striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on one source alone.

#### 3.1.1 Data triangulation

Triangulation is a procedure to ensure that the criterion of validity of the study has been met. The aim is to examine a conclusion in more than one way (Schwandt, 2001). It may be achieved through three approaches, all of them, or a combination of them: Using both qualitative and quantitative method, using more than one way of gathering data inside either quantitative or qualitative method, and finally by using several independent researchers. The common feature between these is that their aim is to secure the study's credibility. Triangulation requires more time, as you need to gather and analyze two different types of data (McKim, 2017). This thesis uses data triangulation, as I have used both interviews and observations. I have done this to both see how the work with personal development is done, and how the participants of the courses experience this work. My perception is that these data gathering methods complement each other and ensure me a better understanding of the phenomenon.

## 3.2 Scientific theory

The study of science is called scientific theory, and it helps us understand what is perceived as scientific knowledge, and what's not, from a given perspective. A researcher's scientific perspective lies the guidelines of the research. This thesis is characterized by a phenomenological approach and is analyzed through an interpretational phenomenological analysis. This is an inductive study, which I will come back to.

### 3.2.1 Phenomenology

The modern founder of phenomenology, Husserl, pointed out that the scientific approach to fact-based understanding threatened the legitimacy of our lifeworld. Lifeworld is a key term in phenomenology, and lifeworld is understood as the reality as it is experienced, what feels meaningful, what is understood as natural and common, and what values the person lives by. Phenomenology is a philosophical scientific theoretical approach to qualitative research that can be understood as systematic research of different ways of experiencing reality. The aim of phenomenology is to understand the subjective meaning, rather than the mere facts and senses we see, feel, hear etc. (Wifstad, 2019). Phenomenology is in line with the purpose of this thesis and was therefore chosen as the scientific theoretical approach. This approach opens to answering the study's research problem, where experience plays a large role. There are other qualitative methodological approaches that also includes human experiences (Tjora, 2011; Yin, 2011), that I could have chosen. I will justify how phenomenology comes through in this study, to be scientifically consistent. The interest of this study is to understand the phenomenon of personal development, as it is experienced by the participants of the leadership development courses. The scientific "truth" of this phenomenon is based on the ontological understanding, that reality is what people perceive it as (Parzanowski, 1996).

### 3.2.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a hermeneutic analytic form where the main role of the researcher is to first invite the informant to share his sense-making, to act as a witness to the representation of information, and at last to make sense of it (Smith, 2018). Turner (2017) explains the rise of this analysis form from psychology, where the researcher interprets the informants' experiences. By doing this psychological approach we consider looking for significant events in the lives of the people we are studying, through their language and their meaning making of events. Finally, Turner uses the term "double-hermeneutic" since the information consists of both the interpretations of the informant and the researcher.

IPA tends to have a smaller, purposive sampling of informants, because the analysis form implies close reading of the data, looking for details in peoples' explanations of experiences, often in line-by-line reading, and even reading between the lines. IPA should be focused on a small number of people and investigate a small number of relevant experiences (Turner, 2018). I will explain my choices linked with sample size in chapter 3.3.1.

### 3.2.3 Inductive

An inductive approach to a study stands contrary to a deductive approach, as they reflect different ways of shifting between data and concept (Yin, 2011). An inductive approach means that the study works its way from data to a more generalized conclusion. Using the gathered data to choose what theories to apply to the study (Schwandt, 2001). I chose this approach to ensure that I have the possibility to gain fresh insight into the real-world event that I studied, which I could have risked not achieving if I chose a deductive approach (Yin, 2011). My aim was to understand the phenomenon of personal development through the informants' experiences, without a guiding hypothesis or theory. With that in mind, it is important to mention that nobody can enter a project without a pre-existing understanding. All understanding is based on a pre-existing understanding. This includes personal meanings and perceptions we have about the phenomenon we are studying (Dalen, 2019). The pre-existing understanding I have about leadership, leadership development and so on, has shaped this thesis, and is also the reason for my choosing of topic. This pre-existing understanding influence my understanding of the studied subject as well as both how the data is gathered and the data itself (Ørbæk, 2013). It is never easy to put one's own pre-existing understanding to the side, as it is imprinted in the behaviors, thoughts, and routines. I have tried to enter the project with a fundamental understanding of the theories while still being shaped as little as possible by them. There are no guaranties that this understanding doesn't influence parts of the study. This will be discussed further in "quality of the study" below.

## 3.3 Data gathering

The data gathering in this study is done through both interviews and observations of leadership development courses and on the participants of these courses. I will explain the process I've been through in this chapter.

### 3.3.1 Sampling and participant contact

In qualitative research there is often conducted a "strategic selection" of participants. (Tjora, 2011). When looking for participants to be informants in my study I had to think about several things. First, their relevance, the informants need to have relevant experience and knowledge about the things I want answers about. The informants also need to be representative to the group I want to conduct my research on, in more specific projects it is easier to know who you should interview (Tjora, 2011), like it is in this project. Since I want to know something about personal development in leadership development, it was only natural that I shifted my focus to such courses and contacted both courses for observation and former participants of these courses for interviews. I chose to interview former participants, because they have completed the course, which increases the chances of any noticeable personal change, or deeper reflection about the whole process they have been through. The sampling of informants was done by contacting different leader development courses that I either knew of or was told about through conversations with leaders and people who work with leader development. I was allowed to follow the leader development program RAD6505 at NTNU, through my supervisor Jonathan Reams. And the "Samspill & Ledelse" leader development program offered by AFF. The course holders also gave me the opportunity to interview former participants of the courses that I observed. The informants were informed about the topic "personal development" before

they agreed to being interviewed, but I did not explicitly demand that they had advanced knowledge about it, since the semi-structured interview would work as a conversation where I could ask clarifying questions and dig deeper into their personal development if they were unsure about what I was aiming for in my questions. I did this because I wanted to understand the experience of any “regular” participant of these courses and not someone who could be considered experts on personal development.

In qualitative research, it is more important to have good informants, rather than many. The quantity of informants will vary from project to project, but the norm is to keep it from being too many. This is done to limit the amount of work regarding transcription and analysis, and even though there aren't any conclusions to how many interviews a qualitative study needs, Tjora (2011), claims that there is typically needed 8-15 interviews in a masters' thesis. This has not been the case at the master's program “Science in Counseling”. Therefore, my aim was to interview 4-6 informants and use the observations as a combination to ensure the quality of the data. To interview more than 6 informants would be too resource-demanding, thinking of the time limit too this project, especially when using the IPA analysis.

### 3.3.2 Interview

Interview is one of the most used data gathering methods in qualitative method, and one of the most used ways of interviewing is by an in-depth semi-structured interview (Tjora, 2011). This kind of interview creates a relatively free conversation around a specific topic. Making the informant reflect over experiences and share his or her lifeworld. By using open-ended questions this type of interview creates answers more “real” and gives insight to how the participants actually experience their personal development (Tjora, 2011; Yin, 2011).

I chose this kind of interviewing to get the full picture of the informant's lifeworld and their thoughts and experiences connected to their own personal development, in a phenomenological perspective.

#### *3.3.2.1 Interview guide and structure*

Before going into the interviews, I made an interview guide. The purpose of an interview guide is to structure the interview, which is done through three phases: warming up, reflection and rounding off (Tjora, 2011). In interviews there is a distinction between open and structured interviews. In open interviews the aim is to make the informants tell as much as possible about their experience. In between open and structured interviews, there are semi-structured interviews. This form of an interview helps the researcher stick to the topic, while simultaneously keeping it open enough for the informant to tell his or her own experiences (Dalen, 2019). I chose a semi-structured interview to make sure I get the spontaneous and honest answers and at the same time keep to topic. The guide was structured based on the problem statement, asking open-ended questions facilitating reflections and a flowing conversation around the topic, rather than a more formal rigid interview. Having this structure gave me the opportunity to ask questions in a way that kept the flow going, and at the same time always keep to the topic intended. I had the chance to ask follow-up questions after each of the questions in the guide, creating a natural conversation where it felt safe to share.

The guide is found in appendix 3.

### 3.3.2.2 Executing the interviews

Interviews may be thought of as the exchange of views, where the researcher asks for the informant's thoughts and opinions (Dalen, 2019). Dalen (2019) stresses the importance of not arguing or moralizing during interviews, and to keep your own interests and opinions out of the conversation. She also mentions the need of experience to be a good interviewer.

With that in mind I did the interviews with as little of my own opinions as possible, asking open questions and giving the informants time to reflect. I didn't argue during the interviews, but rather asked clarifying questions to understand what the informants meant. It is difficult to not let these follow-up questions be influenced by my own thoughts, but I tried to keep the interview free of any of my own meanings. When it comes to experience conducting interviews, this is something I lack. I had 5 interviews in my bachelors' thesis, conducted on leaders, and I have practiced a couple of interviews through schoolwork later on. Therefore, it is impossible for me to announce myself as an expert on interviewing. But I have, on the other hand, practiced asking both open and clarifying questions a lot through these two years of studying counseling and coaching.

The interviews were conducted on zoom because the informants were spread-out all-over Norway. The interviews themselves were conducted accordingly to the interview guide, where I started by presenting myself, the thesis I was working on, informing them about their rights and privacy, and reminded them about their own consent to record the interview before I started recording and asking the opening questions.

### 3.3.3. Transcription

After an interview is completed, the organizing and processing of the material starts. This includes transcription of the recorded interview. It is recommended that the researcher does these transcriptions by themselves, as this process often presents a unique chance to get to know the gathered data better (Dalen, 2019). Tjora (2011) points out the fact that verbal language is not the same as written language, and that it is not possible to translate between the two purely objectively. At the same time, he mentions the need to be more detailed than first thought needed, as you may not know entirely what is important or not at this stage. A pause or stuttering might indicate something important later on in the process.

The most important loss in this process is in visual clues. The information about the mood and the body language of the informant might contain useful clues about the meaning behind the words written down (Tjora, 2011). This means that things such as irony, excitement and so on, are lost in translation between verbal and written language. But because I did both the interviews and the transcription myself; I have a better understanding of the material in the analysis. It is also worth mentioning that a "normalization" of the language leads to increased anonymity in the presented findings. "normalizations" of language is to translate dialects and special words that could otherwise be used to identify informants, into the general language used (Tjora, 2011), in my case bokmål, Norwegian.

### 3.3.4 Observation

Observations grant the researcher access to social situations where the informants are yet to color them with their own interpretations, as they would in interviews (Tjora, 2011). In observations, peoples' behaviors are studied, rather than people's words. In many situations, even a limited number of observations may give a lot of useful additional data, and the combination of both interviews and observations works as "triangulation" (Tjora, 2010; Yin, 2011). Observing without interfering or influencing the informants is a difficult thing to do. By doing a passive, non-participating observations, the informants were influenced as little as possible (Tjora, 2011), even though they knew I was there. Tjora (2011) brings up the importance of fieldnotes when doing observations, these includes what the researcher sees, as well as some reflections. Observations are regarded as a reliable source of information, as this method doesn't rely on people's words or thoughts. This more direct form of data gathering builds on what is actually happening, where the informants give their information through actions (Einarsson & Chiriac, 2002).

When doing observations, the researchers' presence may unknowingly influence the informants, at the same time, the informant's behavior may influence the way the researcher does the observations (Yin, 2011). Being aware of this helps me in both the documenting of data, and the interpretation of it later on, keeping an open mind, yet critical to any influence either way.

#### *3.3.4.1 Documenting Observations*

As mentioned, fieldnotes are important in observations and I chose to systemize my fieldnotes in a categorizing style inspired by Interaction Process Scheme. Interaction Process Scheme (IPS) is designed to suit observations of social interactions in small groups (Einarsson & Chiriac, 2002). It works by defining categories before the observations, making it easier to know what to look for. It is also beneficial in the matter of comparing notes in between different groups, since the categories are the same in all the observations (Einarsson & Chiriac, 2002). It is inspired by IPS, as I have changed some of the codes and categories to suit my research question better.

Yin (2011) mentioned the influence researchers and informants have on each other. With that in mind I noted down the observations notes as descriptively and objectively as I managed and added on my interpretations and thoughts after the initial notes. I did this to try and limit the influence the informants had on my notes. By doing this I could go back and read my descriptive notes and compare them to my interpretations to see if I was influenced in any way. Going back in my notes with a clear head after the observations were completed, was a way to check the quality of my notes and initial interpretations. At the same time, I kept to my IPS scheme to avoid writing down unnecessary information that I wouldn't have any use for.

Other sources could be used to capture observations, such as video cameras and tape recorders (Adomat & Hicks, 2003). I chose to not use cameras as this would give me more privacy problems to handle, and at the same time it could influence the participants of the courses more than necessary.

The observations in the first course were conducted through Zoom, making notes at the same time. The other course took place in Oslo, and I sat in the corner of the room making notes of what I saw, always following the scheme. When the participants went into breakout-rooms I joined some of them to observe how they worked on the task given. I also observed as the participants in Oslo split into groups to work on tasks. This presented some challenges, as I didn't want to disturb, yet I wanted to capture the full picture of



what happened. The groups did not seem to be bothered by my presence and some invited me to join their group when they left the room to do their group work. There were some difficulties observing what every group did at all times, but I got a general idea of how the groups worked most of the time. They sat at different places in the room, making it easier to listen to some of them, then others. I might have missed out on some things that could have been relevant to the study, but at the same time I think I have conducted good observations with the resources I had available.

The IPS inspired template is found under appendix 4.

### 3.4 Analysis

The next step in the process is to analyze the data material from both the interviews and the observations. The IPA method was used to get the most out of the data, starting off with a close reading of the transcriptions, noting things down as I notice them along the way. These notes include reflections, language, and other things I found to be potentially significant. Each read-through gave another opportunity to learn more about the data and I wrote down new notes every time I read through a transcript. To get a better feel of underlying meanings and things such as sarcasm or other hidden information, I listened to the recordings as I read. After making these notes I read through them to transform them into emerging themes. It is not to be avoided that these themes are influenced by every read-through in a hermeneutic way (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). To keep track of all the notes and emerging themes I used Nvivo, an analyzing program that allowed me to systemize and keep a good order of all the data.

The process of transforming notes into emerging themes gave me several themes to consider. The last step of the process was to seek for relationships and cluster the themes, grouping them together according to similarities and then conceptualizing them with a descriptive label (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Some themes fell short as they didn't fit the problem statement I set out to answer, while others were put together in a group where they could answer the problem statement together. By doing this I ended up with the three main categories: holding environment, realizations and improvements, and understanding. The categories are further explained in chapter 4.

The final step of the analysis is to present it, describing each theme one by one while being exemplified with abstracts from the interviews. The presentation explains the things that have been found in the analytic process including analytic comments from the author. This presentation is chapter 4 and is followed up by a discussion which relates the identified themes to the existing literature (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

### 3.5 Quality of the study

A judgement of the quality of the study takes into account whether the findings and conclusions convincingly represent the phenomenon that was examined (Boeije, 2010). To what extent could the results be transferred to other groups or situations, and how are the "making of the findings" conducted (Boeije, 2010; Dalen, 2019), these are important questions when it comes to the quality of the study.

In this section I will explain the researcher's role in the study, as well as other relevant quality criteria.

### 3.5.1 Researchers role

Involvement is necessary for qualitative researchers to find out what they want to know. One effect this involvement has, is that people tend to change their behavior when they know that they are being studied. This negative effect is called "reactivity" and will influence the validity of the study (Boeije, 2010). Another challenge Boeije (2010) talks about is "going native". The researcher might have a personal interest in what is being researched, leading the researcher to lose interest in theory and even the research itself, and get sucked into the world of the informants.

To be aware of which "glasses" the researcher conducts the study through is beneficial, because it makes it possible to identify things such as "going native" before they happen. My own interest in leadership and leadership development might influence me, as I got the opportunity to join and observe two leadership courses, and also interview former participants of these courses. At the same time the researcher's preconception is important to keep in mind. The researcher will enter the study with a preconception that helps understand the phenomenon, but it will also influence the understanding of the informants (Dalen, 2019). My own preconception is linked to what I have read and heard, as well as some of what we have been going through at school. These things limit to mostly academic work and practice, rather than actual leadership development courses. In my mind this granted me an advantage as I could enter the study with a good understanding, but at the same time be very open to the courses and how they worked. My preconceptions made it hard for me to focus only on the observations and notes, as I found the courses very interesting. I was aware of this interest before going into the observations and was therefore able to identify when I started to drift out of the observer role and managed to pull myself back.

### 3.5.2 Reliability

Reliability is referred to as the consistency of the measures used in the study. It is determined by calculating internal consistency and stability over time, making the study trustworthy (Boeije, 2010). Reliability is a difficult term to work with in qualitative research, as it demands that the gathering and analysis of data could be tested by others later on. This is difficult to manage in qualitative research because the researcher's role is important, a role that plays out in the meeting with other people in a given situation. It is near impossible to mimic these exact factors, as every individual is different, and the situations will be different accordingly (Dalen, 2019). Dalen (2019) mentions a way around this, by writing down and explaining the steps along the way as the research progresses. Therefore, I have tried to be transparent by explaining my steps and give insight to the way I have been working and how I have been thinking, making it easier for others to understand and possibly put on my "glasses" in their testing of this study.

### 3.5.3 Validity

Validity is to be specific about the things the researcher sets out to assess, and to use correct measures. The things you ask for or look for as a researcher has to answer the research question you want to investigate. In qualitative research, broadly composed selections are used that include individual variations (Boeije, 2010; Dalen, 2019). The validity of research is increased by being open about how our research is being practiced (Tjora, 2011). I did not ask for any specific informants, thinking of age, gender, role etc.

but got handed possible candidates. This risked the variation in individuals, as I could have ensured a greater spread in individual differences. I did not think that it was necessary to do this to answer my research question, and at the same time it could have made the recruiting process more difficult.

As mentioned, reactivity influences the validity of the study. One challenge linked to reactivity is that it is impossible to know when certain behaviors or opinions have been altered because of the researcher's involvement (Boeije, 2010).

### 3.5.4 Generalizability

Generalizability pertains to whether or not the result of the study can be generalized beyond the specific research context. If the research is not generalizable, the findings only apply to the specific case being examined (Boeije, 2010). The fact that these interviews and observations are done on certain individuals might make it an unrealistic goal to understand absolutely everyone who has been through a leader development course. It could however increase our understanding of the phenomenon of personal development within leader development. The findings presented are generalizable by providing an understanding of the phenomenon, since the study represents a chard selection of participants of these courses, where they all, like everyone else, have their own opinions and interpretations.

### 3.5.5 Reflectivity

The interpretation of data is shaped by a number of conditions, and we need to interpret our own interpretations (Tjora, 2011). As mentioned, we influence each other in a research process (Yin, 2011), and we need to reflect on how we came up with our interpretations and what might have affected us throughout the project. To increase the credibility of the research I noted down my thoughts and considerations along the way as they occurred, making it possible to go back in time to identify changes in my understanding, patterns etc. or certain incidents that might have influenced me.

## 3.6 Ethical considerations

In this section I will highlight the ethical considerations of this project. Some sort of ethical considerations should be a part of any research study. Aspects like respect, trust, confidentiality and so on characterize the relationship between informant and researcher (Tjora, 2011). Research in general is a human practice where social values and ethical principles apply, and where moral dilemmas occur (Boeije, 2010). Firstly, all the participants in this research study have the right of their own privacy. As Boeije (2010, p. 46) states, privacy means that individuals decide to whom they give information about themselves, and that researchers may not disclose such information to others. This project was reported to Norwegian center for research data (NSD) before I started working on it. NSD's role is to ensure the safe and legal gathering, storage, and usage of data, with ethical principles such as privacy intact. The project was approved by NSD before I conducted any data gathering. The approval is found under appendix 1.

### 3.6.1 Informed consent

As a main rule, any research project that includes people should not be started before the informants have been informed and given their consent. The informants could at any time withdraw their consent without any negative consequences (Dalen, 2019). As Dalen (2019, p. 100) states, this consent must be based on free will, and with sufficient information about the project and about the rights of the informants.

I wrote an information letter with a signature line at the bottom, containing information about the project, rights, duration, access to data, what their consent meant, and so on. This was handed out to the informants before I started the data gathering. I also verbally introduced myself and the project to help their understanding. I did this in both the interviews and the observations. The information letter is found under appendix 2.

### 3.6.2 Recording interviews

When recording interviews, we have to explicitly ask the informants for consents. Information about how the interviews were conducted is found in the information letter in the appendix 2. I opened up to any questions the informants might have, to avoid any misunderstandings. The interview was recorded using Nettskjema Diktafon, this app focuses on high demands of privacy and safety and is approved to use in research settings (UiO, 2021).

### 3.6.3 Anonymity

Anonymity indicates that the informants name or other unique identifiers are presented in the data, the same could be said about job titles or even framings or sayings that are often used by certain individuals (Boeije, 2011; Tjora, 2011). Tjora (2011) suggests that possible quotations are sent to the informants concerned before they are included in the thesis, to make sure that the informants are comfortable having these quotations presented. I did not come across any possible quotes that I saw as particularly revealing. With these things in mind, I anonymized the data by substituting names and other identifying information with fictive names. The names I ended up with are Lisa, Erik, Jenny, Andrine and Henrik. Confidentiality is a big part of anonymity (Boeije, 2011), something that I complied with.

## 4 Presentation of findings

In this chapter, the thesis' findings will be presented. These findings are based on the interviews, observations, transcriptions, and analysis as described in the previous chapter. The findings will be exemplified through transcribed quotes from the interviews as well as extracts from my observation notes. The quotes are translated into English, as the interviews were conducted in Norwegian. I have also changed the names of the informants to ensure anonymity. Through the process of analyzing, I ended up with three main categories to answer the problem statement. These are:

- Holding environment
- Realizations and improvements
- Understanding

Each category has several subcategories as a result of the process of analyzing the data. The categories will be presented individually but are highly tied together. What affects personal development, and how it influences participants of leader development courses is a complex thing, consisting of these categories.

Table 1: Main category and sub themes

<b>Main category</b>	<b>Holding environment</b>	<b>Realizations and improvements</b>	<b>Understanding</b>
Subcategory	<i>Sharing</i>	<i>Unpleasant situations</i>	<i>Motivation</i>
Subcategory	<i>Safety and environment</i>	<i>Feedback</i>	<i>Describing "personal development"</i>
Subcategory	<i>Care/understanding</i>	<i>Reflections</i>	<i>Theory/practice</i>

### 4.1 Observations

Observations from the two courses support the findings from the interviews and this section will present some of the observation notes to anchor the findings.

The AFF course had their participants separated into groups throughout the entire week, giving them the chance to slightly develop a culture with safety and room to reflect, give feedback and discuss. As I observed throughout the week, the differences in group development became evident. This affected each individuals' chances of working on their own personal development within the group. They were for example presented with a vital opportunity at the end of the week, to give each other feedback. The group that had shown the most willingness to tell each other about disagreements and to have open and honest discussions along the way also seemed to have the best quality of feedback. By quality I mean honest, constructive, and direct. As seen in my observation notes.

*The leader asked for honest feedback to learn as much as possible. Direct feedback with points of improvement rather than boast. The group is serious, with eye contact and willingness to both*

*listen and give constructive critique. – The group next to them have seemingly less psychological safety [interpretation], lots of laughter and jokes in the middle of giving feedback.*

This feedback was appreciated, and the leader of the group got several things he wanted to bring with him in the future. Feedback is also experienced in the other course, as they go through a 360-feedback process. This process led to realizations and some discomfort as they learned their results and discussed them amongst each other.

Both groups had chances to reflect and think about their actions as well. One course was asked to do a “brain dump” and write down things from the week, including their actions, emotions, and thoughts along the way. The other group learned about the “on the balcony” concept and spent some time discussing how that made them realize how their actions affect other people and how their reactions influence situations. These realizations led to a willingness to keep their reflections with them and try and improve in the future.

Both courses were presented with theories along the way, these theories addressed both personal development, as well as other relevant theories that a leader might use at work or in personal life. Theories such as system 1 and 2 thinking, theories about survival, and Robert Cialdini’s theory about influence were presented while the participants paid attention and made notes along the way. I observed the differences in how quickly the different participants made use of the theories they were presented.

*The participants are eagerly taking notes of the lecture, paying attention. Discussing in the group as they are given a task to win the votes of the other groups with a pitch... One group used several of the influence techniques, while some didn't use any”*

## 4.2 Category 1: Holding environment

The first main category, “holding environment” is connected to the importance of the conditions in and around the course itself. All the informants talked about the environment and how it affected them. Even though they didn’t explicitly use the term “holding environment” themselves, their reflections and narratives leading to the subcategory could be summed up by this specific term. The behavior I saw while observing the two courses supports the statements of the informants and makes the importance more obvious.

The informants describe the importance and the need for a safe space when working on themselves. They describe how it is achieved and how the informants felt being a part of it. Many of the exercises include sharing and difficult emotions, leading to a need of care, understanding and support. To manage to create such a supportive environment, someone has to set the tone and share, helping others build their courage to do the same.

The subcategories leading to the main category will be presented to better understand the main category. All of them are linked together and equally important to the main category.

### 4.2.1 Sharing

This subcategory is about how the participants experience the sharing of stories, reflections, and vulnerabilities in the courses, how it influenced them, and the importance of it, both for themselves and also for the group’s continuation. All the informants talked about this in one way or another.

Lisa found it easier to share these kinds of things with a group of “strangers” rather than colleagues, friends, family, etc. These are people who they will not meet again, making it

easier to not think about judgement or any other negative impacts that may happen if it was shared with for example colleges.

*Both I, and also several of the others said that it was easier to share to a group of strangers that we will never meet again, rather than to friends and family. It was a room to reflect and share.  
(Lisa)*

At the same time several of the informants talked about the importance of someone sharing to make others share. To create the holding environment necessary for the participants daring to share something themselves, it was impactful to have the course holders start.

*The people who held the course gave a lot of themselves. They shared those kinds of stories in plenary, which kind of made the others also dare to tell their stories. (Lisa)*

*...how much the course holders talked about their personal experiences and how much they shared in the group. I think that is useful (Jenny)*

Creating this environment where it was safe to share impacted the informants. To listen to people sharing their experiences, even though they may be hurtful or have influenced their lives in many ways made the course memorable and impactful. As Lisa stated:

*The way everybody gave so much of them self makes this a course I will never forget... I think people are brave and I have a lot of respect for those who shared from their lives. (Lisa)*

The importance of sharing and reflecting upon oneself is perfectly illustrated by Jenny as she talked about realizations that were shared with the group. By going back to the past in an exercise they called "ghosts of the past" they reflected upon how they ended up becoming who they are today and how that influenced their behavior, reactions, and feelings. They reflected upon and talked about things that they had neglected for years, things such as their upbringing and/or painful experiences, and how those experiences have shaped the leaders they are today.

*I remember one person reflecting in the group about himself and the insight he got from these exercises. "Shit, I am a much worse leader than I thought ... now I understand why people react as they do." (Jenny)*

#### 4.2.2 Safety and environment

In this section the informants' view upon the psychological safety and their feeling of the environment is presented. These two subcategories are heavily linked together, and one would not be present without the other. They are therefore presented together.

All of the informants stressed the importance of the feeling of safety in the course, and how that facilitated for a nice base where people could avoid being afraid of judgement or other negatives. Erik talked about how the psychological safety affected him in both one of the courses I studied, but also in other courses he participated in earlier. When asked about how he felt about doing exercises such as "ghosts of the past" he answered:

*it is brutal, but necessary... it has to be done in a safe and controlled environment. I did an equivalent exercise in another course without that kind of environment... that was only destructive.  
(Erik)*

*A psychological safety has to be present to do these kinds of exercises, it has to. It is a prerequisite. (Erik)*

The safety felt in the course contributed to sharing and group reflections. It made it easier to receive feedback because everyone knew that things were said out of respect. This led to a feeling of a unique course where people shared things they had avoided thinking about for many years.

*It is true, the environment felt warm and inclusive... I think it is unique to generate a place where people share stuff they haven't talked about for many years. (Lisa)*

When talking about the realizations people made while receiving feedback and reflecting about them out loud, Jenny said:

*It indicates a good environment where people feel like they can share. (Jenny)*

The personal involvement of the course holders made an impact on the course. By sharing their own experiences, they opened up for others to share and generated this kind of environment.

*The course had a very good closeness between both the participants and the course holders, but also amongst the participants. (Jenny)*

### 4.2.3 Care/understanding

*It surprises me how fast people bond to each other through vulnerability (Jenny)*

This section presents the care and understanding that is essential in the course to create the holding environment necessary for personal development. The care and understanding amongst the participants of the courses created a safe place. It was easier to share as the participants knew that the others in the groups were non-judgmental and took care of them if they needed.

*People felt like they were understood, they felt seen and that it was a warmth in the group because people were so understanding and often had experiences something equivalent themselves (Lisa)*

This feeling of being taken care of made the participants feel safe and therefore shared whatever they wanted. It gave a sort of psychological safety even though many thought that it was tough. The feeling of being cared for is crucial for this sharing to work as intended. If it is abused the sharing will be destructive rather than a positive step towards personal development.

*We took care of those who needed it. Many thought that it was tough. So, it was a good sense of care that I think was really good. (Erik)*

The holding environment is made possible by the participants and course holders sharing, feeling of safety and the care they have for each other. The informants felt this environment, making it easier to participate in the difficult things required to work on their own personal development. Because this environment was present, the participants of the course could really get into themselves, making realizations and try to improve.

The holding environment in these courses is crucial to the sharing and is made up out of care and understanding the participant have for each other. This care provides safety for the participants making it possible to dig into themselves and explore their vulnerabilities and weaknesses.



## 4.3 Category 2: Realizations and improvements

This category describes the factors leading to self-awareness and development in the course. The informants talked about things such as unpleasant situations, getting feedback, and the reflection process they went through, and they all used the realizations they got from these things to try and improve themselves.

Andrine used the realizations she got from the course to gain the ability to “distance” herself from both herself, and situations. This way of observing herself gives her the opportunity to handle situations better and identify emotions and act on them before they get the better of her.

*To be more objective in situations and a little bit less emotionally engaged. Or at least identify and observe myself. That is a big change, identifying strong emotions and not react on them but to cool down. (Andrine)*

*I am able to almost coach myself now. I manage to stop and ask myself what I am doing and why. (Andrine)*

This ability has given her the chance to handle conflict in a better way and also increase her understanding of other people in conflict. She talked about realizing that other people have the same feelings and react to them as she used to do, and therefore it is easier to understand why people act as they do.

The personal development a participant experiences in a course like this is not limited to professional life but is implemented in every aspect of that person’s life. Erik has used this experience to change his focus and better the balance between work and family.

*I am more concerned that there is a balance between work, family, and leisure time... I spend more time with my kids now. The entire family actually. (Erik)*

The same could be said about Lisa as she talks about her husband and children. But at the same time, it shows another aspect of the personal development that the informants experienced. The realization that people interpret things differently, based on where they are in life, where they come from, and so on.

*I have improved on asking questions to figure out complex things. I do this with my husband and children as well. It is only human to interpret things different based on background, where you are in life and so on. (Lisa)*

### 4.3.1 Unpleasant situations

There were many unpleasant situations in the courses, stretching from sitting in silence to sharing or listening to childhood stories. Even though many of the informants felt this unpleasant feeling some way or another, they all agreed that it was valuable to challenge themselves and go into these situations with an open mind.

*You won't do any personal development there [comfort zone]. It is when you are outside your own comfort zone that you learn and develop. (Erik)*

One exercise in one of the courses made a clear impact on the participants, it was called “ghosts of the past” and they were encouraged to look back in time to identify situations or other things that have contributed to shaping them into who they are today. The exercise brought up many things from different participants and both sharing them, and listening to other people’s stories made an impact on the informants, and the other participants of the course.

*When we went back to our childhood and reflected around that. That was uncomfortable, but also useful. I got to put things into perspective as a grownup (Jenny)*

### 4.3.2 Feedback

The feedback is an essential part of the realizations and improvement category, as feedback has the power to both tell you that you are going the right direction when it comes to development, but it could also tell you that you need to change something. Both sides of feedback, positive or negative, give the person receiving it the chance to realize flaws and either continue their improvement strategy or alter it. Both courses in this study had exercises specially designed to give their participants feedback.

The feedback led to several realizations, such as the realization about how good of a leader one of the participants actually is, as mentioned earlier. But also, about things such as how they act in new groups, and how that is perceived by the others. That kind of feedback gave valuable insight into how, in this example, Jenny's attempt to give others room to talk was perceived as her being uninterested.

*I was really engaged in the beginning, but I pulled more and more back to give room to others. I was told that I disappeared and seemed uninterested. (Jenny)*

Even though the feedback gave the participants of the course some realizations about things they could alter in their behavior, or improve in one way or another, it also gave some informants increased confidence. The feedback neglected some problems that one of the informants brought up as challenging, leading to confidence and better self-esteem.

*In a way I gained confidence because I made problems out of things that weren't problems. They thought that these things wouldn't be a problem for me, and that I would solve them with ease, based on how they perceived me... that felt good. (Andrine)*

### 4.3.3 Reflections

The reflections done both in the course, but also in the time after, are valuable to the development of the person. No matter how much feedback a person receives, little will be done if the person doesn't accept it and think about it. Exercises where the big assumptions of the participants were explored gave an opportunity to reflect upon oneself. Henrik thought these kinds of exercises force the participants to reflect. At the same time, he got a "reality check" from reflecting around himself and Kegan's stages. He found out about his big assumption and used that realization to reflect his way towards a better understanding of how he behaves around others, and how that affects him.

*We were forced to reflect upon ourselves... Initially I was pretty sure that I was in the final stages of the development stages, but as I read more and thought more about it, I saw that I recognized a lot from the lower stages. That was a reality check. (Henrik)*

*To always wanting to be liked at the workplace drains me of energy. I accept too much and find myself in positions where I don't want to be. I found out that this wish cost me more than it gave me, and I am trying to change that now. (Henrik)*

The course helped the informants get the ability to reflect better as well. The practice of reflecting that was done within the course led to better and more reflecting after the course. With time, more thought may occur, and the participants get the opportunity to reflect on things that suddenly showed up after the course was finished.

*The course made me spend time to reflect after the course, who I am, why I am where I am, and what I actually want to do. (Jenny)*

Jenny has also used this skill to identify situations quicker at work and an automatic reflection process starts as soon as she senses something might be off. The reflections and realizations she made in the course are brought with her and continued when new situations happen. This applies to both work and personal life and helps her handle situations more effectively and in a better way.

*Things happen at my workplace, and I automatically start to think "wow I am doing this and that, I should do this instead" ... I also reflected on my own childhood in the course, and when situations with my children happen now, I quickly get those reflections back into my head and I think more about them. (Jenny)*

The courses led to several realizations and improvements amongst the informants. This was made possible through the reflections, feedback, and the willingness to be in difficult and unpleasant situations. One of the informants even quit their job and started their own business to help other people after participating in one of these courses. The realizations are based on past, present and what they want for their future, which led to the improvements they all talked about.

The realizations and improvements made in and after the course were made possible by the reflections, feedback, and the courage to be in unpleasant situations. These realizations provide a valuable opportunity to gain self-awareness and therefore develop personally.

## 4.4 Category 3: Understanding

Understanding in this sense aims at the informants understanding of personal development. Their own describing of the term could influence how they perceive their own development. At the same time, it is important to be motivated to learn and change to actually achieve it. The two courses are built up in different ways, whereas one of them focuses on theory in an academic approach, the other focuses on small lectures before they are connected to exercises. These two different approaches could give the participants varied understanding.

### 4.4.1 Motivation

Henrik stresses the importance of being motivated and curious about yourself to get something out of a leader development course. It is not given that everybody has this curiosity. Some might enter the course out of free will and be eager to learn, while others enter the course because their workplace told them to. When someone enters a course that challenges their values and perspectives without wanting to, they might be reluctant to take in what's being said and done.

*The thought about being curious about yourself is important if you want to get something out of the course. If you don't have the inherent curiosity, I think it's going to be hard to understand things, no matter how much you read or am told. That is the most important thing. (Henrik)*

A participant's motivation to join the course is also most likely what that person generally wants to focus on and work with throughout the course. Therefore the initial motivation to join the course is crucial to the participants' personal development. The motivation of my informants varied. While Erik's motivation was more task oriented and limited to learning how to interact with other leaders, Jenny and Lisa focused on the importance of constantly

developing as a leader and learn about positive and negative sides to themselves that they could develop further.

*I wanted to learn more about leadership, and at the same time learn about my own positive and negative sides as a leader and use that to further develop myself. (Lisa)*

#### 4.4.2 Describing “personal development”

The informants were asked to describe what they thought of when I said personal development. This revealed the informants understanding of the term. This showed a perception of personal development involving other people. Even though the informants’ answers included themselves, a lot of it was about other people around them. Jenny talks about both how she develops as a leader, but also how to get the most out of employees. This indicates an understanding of the influence one could have on others, and therefore the value of personal development when it comes to handling our surroundings.

*It is what you want to do for yourself, how to develop to lead those you lead in the best way possible... it is about how to get the best out of your employees and make them thrive. Everybody is different, we have different needs, so a leader needs to see and take into account the employees. (Jenny)*

Erik talks about getting to know one’s strengths and weaknesses as personal development. He also thinks that it is more about improving what you already have instead of trying to change who you are as a person.

*I think it is difficult to change our basic personality. Therefore, we have to be as good as possible with what we are given... to get to know our strengths and weaknesses. (Erik)*

Many of the answers they gave me were limited to their professional life. When I asked if they had thought of any aspects involving their private life, they seemed to have bigger issues going into it. They did, however, get into their personal life in time. Jenny describes herself as an onion that had to be peeled layer by layer and eventually talked about her development in her private life. It seemed like it was easier to talk about less personal things, like situations at work. Their understanding of the term as well as the language they have to express themselves could be decisive factors.

#### 4.4.3 Theory/practice

This subcategory explores the balance between theory and practice in the courses. As mentioned, the two courses had different designs when it comes to theory. Theory in courses like this seemed to develop the participants’ language and increase their understanding of the phenomenon they work with. As Kurt Lewin stated, “There is nothing more practical than a good theory”. It was evident in the interviews that those informants who participated in the more theory heavy course were able to describe their understanding in better words, using more relevant terms in their reflections and so on.

*I have been thinking a lot about myself and the inward-outward thinking. How to reflect about myself in relation to others. (Henrik)*

*The theory in The Map is important to think about... the theory in general in the course with the outward mindset and stuff like that was transformative. I still mentally pull up those tools today. (Andrine)*

The informants seemed to like to have theories to connect their exercises with. It increased their understanding of what they were doing and made it easier to follow and give their

best in the exercises. Some even wanted more theory to get a better understanding of what they were doing, but still knew the importance of trying stuff to learn.

*We were presented with the theory and then we tried the exercises. That was a good way of doing it, it made us understand the exercise. (Lisa)*

*I am actually thinking that I would be good to have a little less exercise and a little more theory, I am always hungry for more knowledge. But it is important. Competence don't come before you do it in practice. (Erik)*

The practice made them understand the theories, but the theories themselves are important later on as well. While the exercises are experiences, they get in the course and something that makes them understand the theories, it is the theories themselves they use later on in life when a situation requires it. This makes the exercises important because they better the understanding of the theories, while the theories are important in themselves.

*You get another consciousness around things, and the theories gives you many things to connect to... I don't talk about the theories with people around me, like a lecture, but I pull them up inside my head and use them. (Jenny)*

*The combination of theory, group exercises and then reflection was valuable. (Jenny)*

The informants' understanding of personal development could be a decisive factor when it comes to actual development. Through the courses they were handed both theories and exercises to increase that understanding. How much they were willing to participate and actually give it their all depends on their motivation to learn and develop. At the same time their understanding of the term "personal development" could influence how they perceive their own development and how they reflect on it, potentially leading to more development.

This chapter has presented the study's findings with the main categories, holding environment, realizations and improvements, and understanding, with their own sub-themes representing them. Showing the different themes that occurred in the interviews and observations that are important to the participants personal development. These categories make it possible to both achieve lateral and vertical development, and they also explain some of the improvements the informants made based on their reflections and realizations, indicating such growth.

These three categories are now to be discussed together with the theories presented earlier.

## 5 Discussion

This thesis' purpose is to gain knowledge about the personal development of participants of leader development courses experience. That knowledge will in this chapter be conveyed through a discussion based on the theory and findings presented earlier. The aim of the discussion is to answer the problem statement "*What affects personal development, and how does it influence participants of leader development courses*" The informants experience of their personal development could be perceived as a dynamic process, consisting of interpretations and preconceptions. The data this study and discussion is based on could be perceived as double-hermeneutic (Turner, 2017), consisting of both the informants' interpretations, and the researchers.

The discussion attempts to shine light on the business of leader development, but one must remember that the business is vast, as mentioned earlier (Arnulf et al., 2016), and therefore impossible to generalize in one study like this. Dahler and Fjellvær (2016) talk about the research's lack of an answer as to how to best conduct leader development, and if it has any economic benefits. Leader development has to be evaluated against what we consider as good leadership of people, as well as good organizing and design of work. Day (2000) describes leader development as human capital focused, and about learning intrapersonal competences, such as self-awareness, self-regulation and so on. This correlates with Stanford Business Schools' study (Carden et al., 2022), where self-awareness was voted as the most important trait that a leader could acquire.

As Kjellstöm et al. (2020) describe in their study, there are several ways of understanding, and conceptualizing leader development. Their results, however, show the importance of the self in leader development, something that this discussion will try and elaborate to increase the understanding around.

### 5.1 Understanding

Understanding as a main category includes the participants motivation, their ability to describe the term "personal development", and the theory and practice they have been given in the course. These sub themes contribute to the participants' ability to develop as I will discuss further in this section. The two courses were designed in different ways, as one of them had a more theory-focused approach than the other, giving the participant a more academic understanding of their personal development and therefore perhaps another way of perceiving their development. With that said, both courses offered theories as well as exercises to practice, meaning that all of the informants had a valuable opportunity to learn and develop their understanding.

#### *Motivation*

Starting off with the first subcategory, motivation, the first thing I can see is the participants' varied reasons to join the courses, as well as their thoughts about why people participate in the courses. As mentioned, a person's motivation to join such a course is most likely also what that person wants to focus on and work with. While Henrik had an approach of being curious about himself, Lisa wanted to learn more about leadership. What could be said about all the informants I interviewed is that they all had a form of motivation to be a part of the course. According to Boyce et al. (2010), motivation is one of the two prime proximal indicators of one's propensity to perform leadership self-development. Since the participants have different motivations, their development might be different as well. Those who have a task-oriented focus might achieve lateral development, while those

with a curiosity about themselves and a focus on their personal aspect might achieve vertical development as Harris and Kuhnert (2007) describe.

Henrik talked about the people who join these kinds of courses based on pressure from their workplace, resulting in reluctant behavior when being challenged about their values and perspectives. Keeping in mind Arnulf et al.'s study (2016), showing that 37 percent reported direct negative experiences, and 13 percent reporting that it influenced their personal life and mental health in a negative matter, and at the same time, as much as 67 percent found it inefficient and a waste of time. Henrik's thoughts about pressure from workplace, and that these people don't have the curiosity and motivation that he stresses as important makes sense as Arnulf et al. (2016) talk about the difficulties leaders experience saying no to participating in such courses, because they represent career possibilities, even though they don't want to participate. This might lead to feeling forced to share vulnerable and personal things, that later on result in unwanted side effects, giving a feeling of loss of control and shame. These feelings might ultimately prevent personal development, as the timing of experiences collide with the stage in the process of development.

It is also worth mentioning Hymans' (2023) top ten barriers to self-growth, where he lists lack of motivation as a decisive factor. Going into the course unmotivated for the wrong reasons might therefore prevent development. The same could be said about the vertical development of those who only have a task-focused motivation, hindering a valuable opportunity to learn something about themselves.

### *Describing "personal development"*

The second subcategory of describing personal development, could indicate the language the participants have when it comes to personal development. The vocabulary one uses indicates understanding, which is important to achieve anything in life. The perception of personal development many of them had, included other people surrounding them, and how they could take into account their employees. It is true, as Axelrod (2012) talks about how influence over others as a leader requires high-level communication and interpersonal skills, it becomes evident that personal development also includes other people and the surroundings. Lee, King, and Altman (2001, p. 71) however, state, "great managers use their whole selves, infusing their work with their own multifaceted, complex character and personality", indicating something wider than a "surrounding-focused" view of personal development.

I think their perception of personal development is a bit defensive and unpersonal. Knowing that self-awareness has been increasingly important in modern organizations (Axelrod, 2012), and that emotional intelligence is important to handle situations appropriately (Klomstén & Fikse (2021), then self-reflection and self-observation are important aspects to achieve these qualities. The surroundings and the world around a person are important to their development, but even more so is that person's willingness to look inside.

With that said, Erik, perceived personal development as getting to know one's strengths and weaknesses and to improve what we already have, rather than trying to change who we are. This perception addresses the two corresponding dimensions of self-awareness one might encounter in such a course, a trait that is increasingly important after the evolution of the modern organization, knowing that it contributes to leadership growth. Increasing the effectiveness of the leader by increasing the degree of harmony and decreasing the amount of internal conflicts in the leaders interpersonal style, and working on values and goals, is something that is achieved through the self-integration and self-alignment processes included in self-awareness (Axelrod, 2012).

The informants also seemed to limit their perception about personal development to their professional life. This might be because they knew that I was studying the phenomenon within leader development, but they found it harder to answer when directly asked about the effect it had on their personal life. This could again indicate the importance of language to fully understand and describe experiences, as Klomstén and Fikse (2021) talk about when it comes to emotions. When I dug a bit into their perception in their personal life, some realizations were made, and Jenny described herself as an onion that had to be peeled layer by layer, seemingly finding it easier to talk about less personal things. This might indicate the fear Hyman (2023) talks about, and the fact that development process is inherently stressful, and ultimately about “losing one’s current identity or way of making meaning in the process of making a new identity”, as Lewis (2011) talks about.

### *Theory/practice*

“There is nothing more practical than a good theory” – Kurt Lewin. The quote is seemingly right, as the informants participating in the more theory heavy course found it easier to describe their understanding. At the same time, they were discussing concepts like “on the balcony” and using it to reflect and gain knowledge about themselves. In the other course, as seen in my observations, their ability to quickly make use of theory varied. This might influence both lateral and vertical growth.

Being taught theories like Kegan and Lahey’s (2001) immunity to change, offers a valuable opportunity to look inward and reflect upon competing commitments, inviting vertical development through challenging beliefs, feelings, and changing the way of being. At the same time, it offers lateral development by learning a skill one might use as a leader on employees.

The participants generally seemed appreciative of the theory they were given; some even wanted more theory. The practice offered ways of understanding the theories, and as Boyce et al. (2010) described the skills needed for development as a synergy of instructional technology and self-regulatory competencies, meaning acquiring competence around different skills, and applying these skills to develop. By practicing the theories lectured, the participants are given an opportunity to try and apply those skills, again facilitating personal development.

This becomes evident as Jenny describes how she makes use of the theory in everyday life:

*You get another consciousness around things, and the theories gives you many things to connect to... I don't talk about the theories with people around me, like a lecture, but I pull them up inside my head and use them. (Jenny)*

The theory and practice the participants go through at these courses facilitate a vocabulary that makes it easier to both describe what personal development is, and therefore understand what it is and how it affects them. This understanding and new knowledge mixed together with their motivation to participate influenced the development they either experience or don’t experience in the course.



## 5.2 Holding environment

Holding environment as a main category includes the sharing done in the courses, the safety they felt being a part of the courses, and the care and understanding they showed each other, both between the participant, and between the course holders and the participants. These sub themes contribute to the environment where it is possible to both take a look inside and get personal, and to share these things with the others without being afraid of negative side effects, as I will discuss further in this section.

### *Sharing*

All of the informants talked about the sharing that was done in the course, both from the course holders, and the other participants. There was a general appreciation of the courage those who shared showed, and it felt easier to share to a group of “strangers” rather than friends, family, colleagues etc. The importance of sharing is shown as Lewis (2011) talks about the opportunity to facilitate growth in another by “holding” them, instead of trying to mend their distress. Helping them own their distress and using it in the process of becoming someone who makes sense of themselves and their life experiences in a more articulate matter is only possible if that person is willing to share.

Both Lisa and Jenny talked about the impact the course holders made when they shared from their own experiences, making it easier for the others to do the same. I was also able to observe this, as one of the courses experienced both illness and accidents amongst the course holders, something they talked openly about. In my experience, that created an environment where it was easier for the other to share as well, and at the same time contributing to the holding environment in terms of openness and transparency.

*The people who held the course gave a lot of themselves. They shared that kind of stories in plenary, which kind of made the others also dare to tell their stories. (Lisa)*

The importance of the sharing environment is shown by Jenny’s example of one other participant, as they did the “ghosts of the past” exercise. “...*Shit, I am a much worse leader than I thought ... now I understand why people react as they do.*”. This correlates with Carden et al.’s (2022) statements of self-awareness as something that predicts leadership performance and success, also claiming that self-awareness leads to better decision making, team performance, and authentic leadership.

### *Safety and environment*

The importance of the psychological safety present in the course is illustrated by Erik, as he talked about the feeling of having it in the course I observed, and the feeling of not having it in another course he participated in. The safety facilitated a base where there was no fear of being judged or other negative side effects. As mentioned, Hyman (2023) stated both fear and lack of support as barriers of self-growth. At the same time Arnulf et al. (2016) talked about the possible negative effects it could have on participants mental health if they feared judgement or experienced other negative side effects.

The sense of safety made the participants dare to look inside and handle situations and emotions they had neglected for many years, as Lisa talked about. This way of working on self-awareness contributes to the three foundational emotional competence skills, self-assessment, emotional awareness, and self-confidence as Axelrod (2012) explains.

Practicing handling these emotions in a safe environment offers a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge about emotions as well as gaining the skills to handle the feelings occurring. Exercises like “ghosts of the past” might waken emotions that have been

neglected for a long time. Practicing identifying those feelings and learning about the needs they represent in a safe environment gives the participants the opportunity to increase their emotional intelligence that both Klomstén and Fikse (2021) and Sadri (2012) explain the importance of.

An environment where people share and show emotions gives the others watching a valuable opportunity to perceive emotions through recognition of facial expressions or body language and interpret them at the same time, increasing their emotional intelligence (Sadri 2012). This practice is evidently important as Browns' (2021) study showed the lack of vocabulary people have when it comes to emotions, and the fact that people are generally bad at interpreting emotions based on facial expression, showed by the critique and newer research denying Tomkins (1964), Izard (1971), and Ekman's' (1971) studies (Barrett, 2017).

### *Care/understanding*

*It surprises me how fast people bond to each other through vulnerability (Jenny)*

A holding environment could be defined as the capacity to create a supportive emotional and/or physical space within which a client can work through and recover from affects that might be otherwise overwhelming (Downing & Lupton, 2021). Lisa talked about the care and understanding amongst the participants as she experienced it, a care that is important to be able to go through the stressful process of development and constructing a new identity (Lewis, 2011).

By being in this sort of environment, the participants were presented with an opportunity to dig into themselves and feel safe at the same time. Lewis (2011) talked about the gift of "holding" a person and facilitating their growth, something that they seemingly managed to make possible in the two courses in this study.

One of the courses (the part I observed) was group based, creating both a general environment and a specific environment within each group, with their own sense of care and understanding. This resulted in different outcomes in terms of safety to give feedback and show disagreements. Giving honest quality feedback is a form of care in my opinion, as it grants the receiver the opportunity to further develop. As mentioned in my observations, one group showed more willingness to disagree and give this kind of feedback, with a collective understanding of wanting to develop and learn rather than taking things personally.

## 5.3 Realizations and improvements

Realizations and improvements as a main category include the unpleasant situations the participants find themselves in, the feedback they get along the way and the reflections they make based on these situations and feedback. These sub themes contribute to personal development in terms of increased self-awareness, realizations of both strengths and weaknesses, and reflections about oneself, the surroundings and what to do with life.

For example, Andrine used her realizations to "distance" herself from both her and the situation she found herself, giving her the opportunity to observe herself and handle situations better. This kind of self-observation and self-reflection is a vital part of improving emotional intelligence and practicing examining one's own thoughts, feelings and ideas (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012). She also talked about the realization of others having the same feelings as herself, and therefore handling conflict better now than before. Emotional awareness like that gives the leader tools to handle complex situations, and being able to

influence others, rather than only being influenced, making it less likely to be ruled by your own emotions (Axelrod, 2012).

### *Unpleasant situations*

Many of the participants found situations in the courses to be unpleasant, while some said that they didn't notice any discomfort. Erik stresses the importance of getting out of your comfort zone to develop, and as Kegan suggests "one must lose one's mind on the way to gaining a new mind", it is imaginable that such situations can be uncomfortable.

It also comes to mind that those who refuse to participate with their full self and dare to be vulnerable, might not find it to be uncomfortable, as they don't look inside to the same extent as the others. Denial, defensiveness, and lack of responsibility are three of the hindrances to growth according to Hyman (2023). These might be people with a fixed mindset, falling back on defensive mechanisms, rather than embracing their flaws in an attempt to develop, and therefore achieving less than their potential (Dweck 2006).

To be in emotionally uncomfortable situations, like those that often occur in these courses, could help the participants build the courage to stay in those situations in other circumstances, such as with a co-worker. The emotional competence gained by practicing finding oneself in these kinds of situations could prove valuable when uncomfortable situations occur at work or in personal life.

### *Feedback*

Both courses were designed to give their participants feedback, they were also either instructed to give it in a certain way, or they were given a system, such as 360-feedback, securing an understanding through instructions and corrections, rather than informing someone solely about correctness (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Axelrod (2012) talks about accurate self-assessment, and how it could be achieved through feedback. His statements are correlating with what Jenny experienced in her feedback, where she was perceived as uninterested, even though she only tried giving others room to talk.

Both positive and negative feedback have benefits. Positive feedback can increase the likelihood that someone returns to or persists in an activity (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), something Andrine experienced as she gained confidence about her ability to solve problems. At the same time, negative feedback, or constructive critique is more powerful when aimed at the self, even though people tend to try and confirm their self-perception as Hattie and Timperley talks about. In my observations, the leader of one of the groups got feedback on his self, that he evidently approached with a growth-mindset, rather than a defensive fixed-mindset as Dweck (2006) describes.

One of the courses used 360-feedback as a method, asking both peers, and leaders, as well as friends and family to give feedback. This method led to several realizations, some that they agreed with and some that they disagreed with, at least initially. The realizations were a source of discomfort as they had to look into themselves and figure out what it meant. They got the opportunity to both speak with a supervisor about the results, as well as discussing it in groups. The participants were seemingly affected by some of the results and were in the middle of processing it, making meaning of it and perhaps develop in one of the levels Kegan (1982, 1994) describes in his theory. The 360-feedback method can confront leaders with their strengths and weaknesses and improve their awareness and self-assessment (Axelrod, 2012).

### *Reflections*

The reflections done in the course, as well as in the time after, offer valuable insights into one's own self, and could possibly increase the level of development in the subject-object meaning-making as Kegan describes (1982, 1994). As mentioned, the theories and vocabulary are again important, as it gives the individuals a way of understanding and therefore making it easier to identify where they are in the developmental process. Henrik talked about the realization and the reality check he got, as he learned more about the stages of development, understanding that he had a lot more to develop before he was at the final stages.

Henrik also used the immunity to change exercise to reflect around his behavior at work, realizing that the way he accepted things and his wish to be liked, actually cost him more than it gave him. This realization, the work he put down to both make it, and to work on it could indicate a development from level three, towards the fourth in Kegan's theory.

At the same time, the informant's lateral development increased, in the ability to quicker use reflections in situations where it is required to think fast, and therefore achieving better results, as Jenny describes when she talks about her ability to think about what she is doing, and what she should do instead.

Jenny has used her newly increased ability to reflect, to think about what she wants to be, and what she really wants to be doing with her life. These kinds of reflections indicate a thought process, where their meaning-making, their understanding of both themselves and the world is considered and perhaps a growth in Kegan's levels. Andrine used the realizations she made in the course to quit her job and start her own business, helping other people.

This discussion has put the findings presented earlier up against relevant theories as well as previously conducted research. A short summary shows that there are several incidents of personal development amongst the informants in the study, both in a lateral and in a vertical manner. Many realizations have been made, and the courses have contributed to reflections, feedback, provided theories and kept their participants in uncomfortable situations, but at the same time maintained a holding environment, which is crucial for development. Even though many of the informants experienced what could be perceived as both lateral and vertical development, there are several things that prevent development, such as a fixed mindset, defensiveness and either the lack of- or the wrong motivation. Some examples have been made of people seemingly not experiencing the same feelings and thoughts as the rest, perhaps indicating a resistance to development, and therefore not achieving their full potential.

## 6 Conclusion

The purpose of this master's thesis has been to uncover new knowledge about the personal development that participants in leader development courses experience, and to answer the problem statement "*What affects personal development, and how does it influence participants of leader development courses*".

In this section I will attempt to gather the threads to provide a holistic view of the thesis. I will summarize and conclude by pointing at the thesis' contribution and limitations, before I will recommend further research.

### 6.1 Contribution of knowledge

First and foremost, the study provides knowledge about personal development, within leader development. The following is the answer of the problem statement and a conclusion of the thesis.

The participants' understanding and motivation to join the course played a role in their development. Participants' different motivations affected how they focused their learning and development during the course. Task-oriented individuals appear to have experienced more lateral development, while those curious about themselves appear to have experienced more vertical development. As well, their understanding of personal development affected their own ability to develop, learn about both themselves and others. This understanding was facilitated through theory and practice, allowing participants to develop both laterally and vertically. Factors like sharing, psychological safety, and care among participants are crucial for personal development. Sharing created a supportive environment and contributed to emotional competence. Both positive and negative feedback helped participants reflect and improve. Some participants dared to be in discomfort and grew, while others were more resistant, missing their chance to develop. Reflections and improvements made during and after the course were influenced by challenging situations and feedback. The process of giving, receiving, and interpreting feedback in a safe environment promoted development. The vocabulary and knowledge gained in the course enhanced reflections and led to realizations. Participants made great changes in their lives, such as prioritizing family, starting businesses, or advancing in their personal development. Participants who were reluctant to look inwards experienced limited growth, compared to the rest, in terms of acquiring skills but not self-awareness.

The answer to the problem statement will now be elaborated further, in a summary.

The informants experience of their personal development, in this study, could be perceived as a dynamic process, consisting of interpretation and preconceptions. The understanding the participants of the courses possess, influenced their personal development, including their motivation to join the course as well. Feeling forced to participate might make them reluctant to give it their all, leading to not reaching their potential. The informants came into the courses with different motivations, and therefore went through it with different focus. Those with task-oriented focus experienced more lateral development, while those with a curiosity about themselves experienced more vertical development. Their understanding of the term "personal development" impacted their own development, thinking of the vocabulary and the terms they use to understand personal development, both within themselves and in others. This is important because it helps getting to know one's weaknesses and strengths, build self-awareness and reduce inner conflict. It also helps in private life, as they develop and understand the world around them better, which most of the informants seemed to struggle to talk about.

This understanding and vocabulary was facilitated through both theory and practice, giving the participants a chance to both develop laterally and vertically. Learning theories like immunity to change gave the participants the tools to both develop within the course and use them later, either on themselves or on others.

Crucial factors to make personal development possible include the sharing done in the courses, the safety the participants experience and the care they have for each other in such courses. The fact that many of them did not know each other and never were to meet each other again, made it easier to share vulnerable things. Sharing led to being "held" by the others, which often led to realizations. To be able to share, there has to be a sense of safety within the course. Fear and other negative side effects ruin the environment and prevents sharing, possibly causing negative effects on those attending the course. Sharing, and witnessing others share, contributes to the growth of emotional competence, giving the participants an opportunity to develop. This environment is achieved through care and understanding between both the participants themselves, and between the participants and the course holders. With care and understanding present, there is a better chance of daring to dig into oneself, this care is also presented through feedback, as those giving it want to make those receiving it better. With these categories present, the participants are able to discuss and disagree in a safe environment, leading to better quality feedback.

How the participants are affected in terms of personal development can be seen in the reflections and improvements the participants have made in and after the course. Those reflections and improvements come from the unpleasant situations they find themselves in, the feedback they get, and the reflections they make. Losing one's mind on the way to gaining a new mind is unimaginably uncomfortable, and this implies getting out of the comfort zone. Some welcome that challenge and use it to grow, while others are more reluctant and defensive, having a fixed mindset and missing their opportunity to develop.

The feedback in the courses gave the participants valuable input into their selves, on a personal level, and on a professional level, where both gave them opportunities to consider that feedback and use it to develop laterally or vertically. The positive feedback increased confidence and trust, while the more negative feedback spotlighted areas of improvement that was welcomed by the receiver in a safe environment. 360-feedback offered surprises and realizations amongst the participants that were difficult to swallow at first, but held value in the long run, as they got the time and help to reflect. This process of both giving, receiving, and interpreting feedback in a safe environment gave the participants the opportunity to develop if they kept a growth-mindset and accepted their flaws. The situations they found themselves in, as well as the feedback they received led to several vital reflections in terms of the subject-object meaning-making development, as they got an opportunity to understand themselves in a new way. The vocabulary, terms, and general knowledge they learnt in the course helped the reflections be better than they were before, granting the opportunity to further understand things in a new way. The reflections and realizations my informants had during and after the courses led to things such as, but not limited to; spending more time with family and less at work, quitting one's job and starting an own business to help others, starting the move from level three to level four in the constructivist development theory, for those with a growth-mindset that were motivated, honest, and non-reluctant to dig into themselves. The development of those who did not dare to dig into themselves could be limited to a lateral growth, only learning theories and skills, and not something about themselves.

## 6.2 Limitations of the study

The study naturally has its limitations that I will present in this section. My own preconception has influenced the process of the research, as well as the analysis and findings. Even though I have written a journal to follow my steps, and reflect along the way, it has been difficult to always show how my preconceptions have influenced the work along the way. To give a transparent description of the process has therefore been a challenge, even though I try to reflect and think about my choices, many things happen unconsciously.

The selection of informants consists of leaders participating in two different courses, with a varied level of experience, job titles, roles, and areas of responsibility. Most of them also lack the academic background to be able to describe personal development in a nuanced and in-depth way. This is arguably both a negative and a positive, as I was searching for the personal development of leaders, not experts, at the same time it might have limited their ability to give answers that correlate with their actual experience. The two courses were different in their approach, as well as execution, and it could therefore be discussed whether or not the participants are comparable.

The thesis' problem statement and focus changed in the process, starting off as a wish to make a model of leader development. Understandably, I was told that such a project was way too big for a half-a-year master's thesis and had to limit it into a more specific problem statement. That statement was initially "what are the common factors of different leader development courses, with a focus on personal development, and how do the participants experience it?" I knew that it was most likely to be changed somewhere in the process, and I did so in the analyzing work. Some changes had to be made, that perhaps influenced the thesis in one way or another.

I realize now that personal development and leader development are comprehensive topics for a master's thesis, the thesis is therefore more overreaching than detail focused. I could have limited my focus even more to make it less overreaching, into for example self-reflection, emotional intelligence, or feedback. I found that difficult as I am interested in it all, which might have influenced the thesis.

## 6.3 Need of further research

The study answered the thesis' problem statement, but more questions could be asked about the personal development within leader development. As mentioned there has not been too much research on the negative effects leader development potentially has on participants. I tried to include that in this study, but there are potentially many research projects that could investigate this further. I also think there is a need for knowledge around the influence personal development has on participants in a setting like this in relation to personal life, as my informants struggled to answer that question in a satisfying matter. I also mentioned the lack of knowledge surrounding the economic effect and that organizations rarely evaluate the effect of leader development; some have tried to study this, but it could be investigated further in another study.

## 6.4 Finishing words

It has been interesting working on this thesis, and it is going to be interesting to follow the world of leader development in the future, hopefully both by being a part of it and by reading new studies. I have made a series of choices along the way, some of them were easy and some of them were hard. The hardest choices have been to exclude areas of interest both at the start of the study, and as they have occurred during the work and data gathering. I hope that this study has contributed with something useful, either in the field of research, the field of leader development, to any person reading it, or any of my informants who got a chance to reflect on their own personal development in the interviews.



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# Appendix

Appendix 1: Approved notification form for the processing of personal data

Appendix 2: Information letter and consent form

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Appendix 4: Observation scheme

## Appendix 1: Approved notification form for the processing of personal data



[Meldeskjema](#) / [Personlig utvikling i lederutvikling](#) / Vurdering

# Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

**Referansenummer**

999901

**Vurderingstype**

Automatisk

**Dato**

05.01.2023

**Prosjekttittel**

Personlig utvikling i lederutvikling

**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon**

Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet / Fakultet for samfunns- og utdanningsvitenskap (SU) / Institutt for pedagogikk og livslang læring

**Prosjektansvarlig**

Jonathan Reams

**Student**

Håkon Viken

**Prosjektperiode**

05.01.2023 - 01.06.2023

**Kategorier personopplysninger**

Alminnelige

**Lovlig grunnlag**

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.06.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#)

**Grunnlag for automatisk vurdering**

Meldeskjemaet har fått en automatisk vurdering. Det vil si at vurderingen er foretatt maskinelt, basert på informasjonen som er fylt inn i meldeskjemaet. Kun behandling av personopplysninger med lav personvernulempe og risiko får automatisk vurdering. Sentrale kriterier er:

- De registrerte er over 15 år
- Behandlingen omfatter ikke særlige kategorier personopplysninger;
  - Rasemessig eller etnisk opprinnelse
  - Politisk, religiøs eller filosofisk overbevisning
  - Fagforeningsmedlemskap
  - Genetiske data
  - Biometriske data for å entydig identifisere et individ
  - Helseopplysninger
  - Seksuelle forhold eller seksuell orientering
- Behandlingen omfatter ikke opplysninger om straffedommer og lovovertrедelser
- Personopplysningene skal ikke behandles utenfor EU/EØS-området, og ingen som befinner seg utenfor EU/EØS skal ha tilgang til personopplysningene
- De registrerte mottar informasjon på forhånd om behandlingen av personopplysningene.

**Informasjon til de registrerte (utvalgene) om behandlingen må inneholde**

- Den behandlingsansvarliges identitet og kontaktopplysninger
- Kontaktopplysninger til personvernombudet (hvis relevant)
- Formålet med behandlingen av personopplysningene
- Det vitenskapelige formålet (formålet med studien)
- Det lovlige grunnlaget for behandlingen av personopplysningene
- Hvilke personopplysninger som vil bli behandlet, og hvordan de samles inn, eller hvor de hentes fra
- Hvem som vil få tilgang til personopplysningene (kategorier mottakere)

- Hvor lenge personopplysningene vil bli behandlet
- Retten til å trekke samtykket tilbake og øvrige rettigheter

Vi anbefaler å bruke vår [mal til informasjonsskriv](#).

**Informasjonssikkerhet**

Du må behandle personopplysningene i tråd med retningslinjene for informasjonssikkerhet og lagringsguider ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon. Institusjonen er ansvarlig for at vilkårene for personvernforordningen artikkel 5.1. d) riktighet, 5. 1. f) integritet og konfidensialitet, og 32 sikkerhet er oppfylt.

# Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

## *”Personlig utvikling i lederutvikling”?*

Intervju/Observasjon

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å finne faktorer som bidrar til personlig utvikling i ulike lederutviklingskurs. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

### **Formål**

Formålet med prosjektet er å finne faktorer som bidrar til personlig utvikling i ulike lederutviklingskurs og hvordan deltakerne har opplevd og dratt fordel av kurset. Dette går på å observere kursene og intervju tidligere deltakere for å danne en bred forståelse. Observasjonen vil ikke direkte påvirke deltakerne, intervjuet foregår en-til-en og vil være anonymt.

Jeg ønsker å finne ut hva kursene har gjort for deltakernes personlige utvikling og om det er noen forskjeller mellom ulike kurs. Ikke i en direkte sammenligning, men for å se om i hvilken grad ulike tilnærminger har ulike resultater.

Forskningsprosjektet er et masterprosjekt.

### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Institutt for pedagogikk og livslanglæring ved NTNU er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

### **Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Du får spørsmål om å delta i prosjektet fordi du deltar i et lederutviklingskurs som inngår i studien. Jeg har fått lov til å kontakte deg gjennom kurset du deltar på.

### **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Deltakelse i undersøkelsen innebærer at jeg observerer deres arbeid i kurset. Opplysningene som samles inn, vil anonymiseres og senere slettes ved prosjektets slutt. Jeg vil ikke direkte involveres i det dere gjør og kommer ikke til å forstyrre på noen som helst måte.

### **Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.



Opplysningene anonymiseres og oppbevares utilgjengelig for andre enn meg selv og veileder i prosjektet (Jonathan Reams).

Det vil ikke være mulig å kjenne igjen dere selv for andre enn dere selv ved prosjektets slutt og publisering.

### **Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?**

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 01.06.23. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger anonymiseres. Personopplysninger vil da slettes og bare de opplysningene som publiseres vil være tilgjengelig.

### **Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Instituttet for pedagogikk og livslang læring ved NTNU har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandørs personverntjenester vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

■■■■ Institutt for pedagogikk og livslang læring ved Håkon Viken ■■■■  
■■■■ eller Jonathan Reams – ■■■■

- Vårt personvernombud: Thomas Helgesen ■■■■

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen av prosjektet som er gjort av SIKTS personverntjenester ta kontakt på:

- Epost: [personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no), eller telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

*Jonathan Reams*  
(Forsker/veileder)

*Håkon Viken*  
(Student)

## Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet personlig utvikling i lederutvikling og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i observasjon
- Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

-----  
(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

### Appendix 3: Interview guide

#### Intervjuguide Masterprosjekt Lederutvikling

Starte med å presentere meg selv, prosjektet, hvorfor vi har møttes, betydningen av å delta. Fortelle om anonymitet og rettigheter. Spørre om det er noen spørsmål og si at det kommer til å ta ca. 45-60 minutter avhengig av hvor mye deltakeren har å si. Få bekreftet tillatelse til å ta lydopptak.

#### Hva påvirker personlig utvikling og hvordan påvirker det deltakerne av lederutviklingskurs

##### **Innledende spm.**

1. Kan du fortelle litt om hva du jobber med og hvordan det er å være leder der.
2. Hvor lenge har du vært leder her? Og har du hatt lederrolle(r) tidligere?
3. Hva var motivasjonen til å delta på kurset? (Ta en master – JR kursdeltakere)

##### **Intro spm.**

Hva tenker du på når jeg sier personlig utvikling?

##### **Kurset.**

1. Hvordan var din opplevelse med lederutviklingskurset? (Og masteren generelt – JR kursdeltakere)
2. Er det noe spesielt du husker, eller noe som gjorde ekstra inntrykk?
3. Husker du noen øvelser eller lignende dere brukte? Hva synes du om dem (AFF – rangere hverandre utifra makt, stemme ut dårligste gruppen og søke seg inn i nye grupper individuelt)
4. Gjorde det noe med deg, eller så du om det kanskje gjorde noe med andre? --hvordan håndterte dere det? – ble det satt i gang noen tankeprosesser? fortell

##### **Personlig utvikling.**

1. Har du lagt merke til noen forskjell, personlig, etter kurset? Hva, hvordan, fortell
2. Har du tatt i bruk noe av det du lærte på kurset, øvelser, eller oppdagelser du har gjort om deg selv? Hva, hvordan, fortell.
3. Har du fått tilbakemeldinger på en forandring etter kurset, har du søkt tilbakemelding? Hvordan følte dette, hva har du gjort med det?
4. Opplevde du noe du syntes var ubehagelig? Kan du fortelle litt om det?

##### **Avsluttende.**

1. Har du noe mer knyttet til kurset og egen personlig utvikling du ønsker å legge til?
2. Noe annet knyttet til det vi har snakket om, som du har lyst til å snakke mer om?
3. Kan jeg kontakte deg på nytt dersom jeg har noe mer jeg lurer på?

#### Appendix 4: Observation Scheme

##### **Observasjonsnotater**

##### Kattegorier:

Feedback, kommunikasjonsferdigheter, oppdagelser, holding environment, refleksjoner, teori/øvelse, deling.

Hva gjøres (øvelse, samtale, refleksjon osv.)	Hva ser jeg (reaksjon, kroppsspråk, osv.)	Hvorfor noterer jeg dette:	Annet:



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