Tord Carlsen

Feedback as a means for leader development

An exploration of the phenomenological experience of getting feedback and how to make use of it

Master's thesis in Science in Counselling
Supervisor: Jonathan Reams
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the participants' experience of receiving feedback using The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP). I examined what assumptions the participants had about themselves as leaders, how they reacted emotionally in the face of feedback, how they handled this afterwards through a debriefing process, and finally what this has done for their motivation moving forward. In addition to this, I also looked at how this process can be used for further development for the individual leader.

The participants in this research project are five individuals with leadership responsibilities who have taken part in a feedback process associated with a leadership development course. To find out what this experience has been like for the participants, the thesis makes use of a qualitative research method, more specifically semi-structured interviews. The data collected through the interviews has then been transcribed and analyzed to result in several research findings. These findings have been organized and presented in the form of five categories: *managers may experience a high degree of self-criticism, receiving feedback can create emotional responses, it is important to process your feedback, getting feedback may help you build confidence in your leadership abilities* and *feedback is valuable*.

In receiving their feedback, all the participants have shown emotional responses that ranged from motivation and joy, through the need for distance, to sadness. As a result, some have had a need to shut themselves in, while others have had the need to take immediate action. Part of the process has also been to be guided through a debriefing process by a debriefer. After this process, several of the participants have concluded that it has been very valuable to get feedback, despite having some initial negative feelings. Some have even taken steps to use this acquired information as a basis for further development, although no specific goals have been set yet.

How the participants handle their feedback can be seen, among other things, in the light of level of development and personality, but also how they process it afterwards. The thesis therefore concludes that feedback can be valuable for leader development, if you are able to make meaning out of it. One way of doing this is through the help of a coach or a debriefer.

Abstract in Norwegian

Hensikten med denne oppgaven har vært å undersøke deltakernes opplevelse av å få tilbakemeldinger gjennom bruk av tilbakemeldingsverktøyet The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP). Oppgaven undersøker hvilke antakelser deltakerne har om seg selv som leder, hvordan de har reagert følelsesmessig i møte med tilbakemeldingene, hvordan de har håndtert dette i ettertid gjennom en debriefingsprosess, og til slutt hva dette har gjort med videre motivasjon for utvikling. I tillegg tar oppgaven også for seg hvordan denne prosessen kan brukes for videre utvikling hos den enkelte.

Deltakerne i forskningsprosjektet er fem individer med lederansvar som har tatt del i en tilbakemeldingsprosess tilknyttet et lederutviklingskurs de har deltatt på. For å få tak i hvordan denne opplevelsen har vært for deltakerne benytter oppgaven en kvalitativ forskningsmetode gjennom bruk av semi-strukturerte intervju. Dataene innsamlet gjennom intervjuene har så blitt transkribert og analysert for å komme frem til forskningsfunnene. Disse funnene har blitt organisert og presenteres i form av fem kategorier: *ledere kan ha en høy grad av selvkritikk, å motta tilbakemeldinger kan skape følelsesmessige reaksjoner, det er viktig å prosessere tilbakemeldingene, tilbakemeldinger kan skape selvtillit og tro på egne lederegenskaper* og *tilbakemeldinger er verdifulle.*

I mottakelsen av tilbakemeldingene har alle deltakerne vist emosjonelle reaksjoner, fra motivasjon og glede til tristhet. Som resultat av dette har noen har hatt behov for å lukke seg inne, mens andre har hatt behov for å ta umiddelbare grep. En del av prosessen har også vært å bli veiledet gjennom en debriefingsprosess. Etter denne prosessen har flere av deltakerne konkludert med at det har vært veldig verdifullt å få disse tilbakemeldingene, til tross for negative følelser innledningsvis. Noen har tatt grep for å bruke denne tilegnede informasjonen som grunnlag for videre utvikling, selv om det ikke har blitt satt noen spesifikke mål enda.

Hvordan man håndterer disse tilbakemeldingene kan blant annet sees i lys av utviklingsnivå og personlighet, men også hvordan man bearbeider de i etterkant. Oppgaven konkluderer derfor med at tilbakemeldinger kan være verdifullt for lederutvikling, så lenge man evner å skape mening ut av dem. En måte å gjøre dette på er å få hjelp gjennom en coach eller debriefer.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Choosing a Theme

In this thesis I explored the field of adult development and looked more closely at how feedback can be used as a developmental tool for people occupying leadership positions. My goal was to explore how the participants experienced receiving feedback, and how this might be used for leader development. Van Velsor & McCauley (2004) have defined leader development as the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes (p. 2). In terms of understanding what develops as a function of leadership development, self-knowledge or self-awareness is a key concern. At the core of enhancing this self-awareness is the use of feedback (Day & Dragoni, 2015, p. 138).

As some aspects of a leader's performance cannot be accurately evaluated without feedback from others, self-assessments might therefore not be the most accurate way to evaluate yourself as a leader (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014, p. 632-633). Feedback has therefore proven to be one of the most relevant factors in leader development, as feedback can function as a mirror where people can observe their own behavior in a more objective manner (Steele et al., 2018, p. 28; Dembkowski et. al., 2006, p. 56). One core element of coaching and counselling is therefore the use of feedback, which is how I relate the topic of my thesis to the counselling programme I have attended over the last two years.

There are also some personal reasons for choosing this theme. In my career, I have experienced what it is like to have different leaders who, in my eyes, can be characterized as both inspiring and uninspiring. A common denominator among the uninspiring leaders has been a lack of self-awareness, and how their actions and behavior affect their employees. I therefore believe that the ability to be self-aware could be a contributing factor in terms of the leadership abilites. A way of gaining this information is through feedback from those around you. I think this is essential, as those leaders I have experienced who manage to inspire are those who are always seeking information. Information about co-workers and subordinates, information about their work environment, but most importantly: information about themselves. However, as Norwegians are more inclined to be nice than honest because we are so shy of confrontation (Tveita, 2022), we might contribute to holding back feedback, and in that way rob the leader of the opportunity for growth and development.

There is also a fairly short history of rigorous scholarly theory and research on the topics of leader development (Day et. al., 2014, p. 64). As a result, I wanted to contribute to this developing field. In order to understand better how feedback can be used to develop leaders, I set out to research this. Through my supervisor, I was granted access to the leadership course which the participants participated in, and their experience in receiving their 360-feedback therefore formed the basis for my research.

I have now presented the reasoning behind the choice of theme. In the next section I will present the problem statement the research has been based on.

1.2 Problem statement

This thesis is based on the following problem statement:

How can feedback function as a part of leader development? An exploration of the phenomenological experience of getting feedback and how to make use of it.

Research questions:

1. *What assumptions might leaders have of themselves, and can feedback change their assumptions in any way?*

2. *How can feedback be valuable as a developmental tool for leaders?*

I have now presented the background for the choice of theme and the problem statement that derived from it. In the next section I will outline the structure of the thesis.

1.3 Thesis structure

The thesis is split into six chapters, not including abstract, acknowledgements, references, and appendixes. The chapters are introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, presentation of findings, discussion, and conclusion.

In chapter 1, introduction, I have framed my thesis by explaining my choice of theme and presented my problem statement. In chapter 2, theoretical framework, I will shed light on relevant research and theories pertaining to the field of leadership development and feedback. This is to form a theoretical backdrop which the thesis can be viewed in relation to. In chapter 3, methodology, I will explain methodological choices done to gather data for my research project. In chapter 4, presentation of findings, I will present data gathered relevant to my problem statement and research questions. In chapter 5, discussion, I will discuss the research findings with the theory in mind. This is where I will make lines between theory and practice in addition to explore new avenues of thought. Finally, in chapter 6, conclusion, I will present my main points. I will also look at some limitations and give suggestions for further research, before presenting some concluding comments.

This concludes the introduction. In the next chapter I will lay the theoretical groundwork the thesis has been built upon.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will present relevant theories which have functioned as the theoretical foundation for my thesis. One strand of adult development coined as constructive-developmental theory (CDT) will be the main theory behind my research. The reason being that CDT is the developmental stage theory most frequently used in leadership literature (McCauley et. al., 2006, p. 635). Beyond this framework, I have also included other categories of theory relevant to my problem statement. The categories are *leader development*, *feedback, The Leadership Circle Profile, self-awareness, affective effect of receiving feedback* and *leadership coaching.* I will now present theories on particular areas of interest residing within these categories, starting with constructive-developmental theory.

2.1 Constructive-developmental theory

Adult development theory is rooted in psychology and has developed to become a diverse set of empirically grounded models and metrics for supporting how we can look at human experience (Reams, 2014, p. 123). One strand of adult development is constructive-developmental theory developed by the American psychologist Robert Kegan. He developed CDT as a stage theory of adult development that focuses on the growth and elaboration of a person's ways of understanding the self and the world (Pannell, 2021, p. 357; McCauley et. al., 2006, p. 634). Kegan found that adults continue to develop their cognitive and meaning-making capabilities based on two assumptions; humans construct their view of the world, and this view evolves over time (Pannell, 2021, p. 357-358). It is constructive in that people construct their interpretations of real-life experiences, and it is developmental in that these interpretations grow more complex over time (McCauley et. al., 2006, p. 635). Based on this, he articulated a sophisticated model of how the self evolves through a series of orders of consciousness (Reams, 2014, p. 138). This model posits five orders or levels of development (Kegan, 1982, 1994, as cited in McCauley et. al., 2006, p. 638). Due to the scope of this thesis, I will limit my explanation to level 3 through 5 (Kegan, 1994, as cited in McCauley et. al., 2006, p. 638).

At level 3, or the dependant stage, people can internalize the desires and wishes of others, to which they seek to conform, and are likely to value the structure and safety offered by a group (Lawrence, 2016, p. 126). In other words, the orientation at this level involves a focus on belonging and being liked, where approval, mutual respect, and affiliation are central concerns (Pannell, 2021, p. 358; McCauley et al., 2006, p. 637). Individuals operating at this stage can reflect on their own needs and desires but have the capacity to override these needs and coordinate them with the needs of others (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 637). For the individual, this means that the entire world functions as a mirror, and they spend a lot of energy determining how people perceive them (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2016, p. 109). This means that if those around the individual sees them as capable and smart, that is how the individual sees themself. On the other hand, if the world around them sees them as lazy and incompetent, that is how they will define themselves.

The shift from level 3 to level 4 entails no longer being dependent on peer dynamics and how they are viewed by others. Developing into level 4, or the independent stage, means no longer being bound by the expectations of others or society (Pannell, 2021, p. 358).

Individuals operating at this level rely on their own internally generated values and standards. These self-generated values and standards equip them with a perspective to examine the various opinions and ideologies of others and mediate among them (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 638). In other words, when reaching level 4, you simply don't only have values, you become those values (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2016, p. 141). In addition, the level 4 individual no longer look to others as a mirror to reflect how they view themselves but uphold a strong sense of ownership of their own strengths, weaknesses, and contributions (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2016, p. 141-142).

Individuals at the fifth and final level, perceive the limits of their self-constructed independent ideology, and so shift to valuing the similarities of other's ideologies and the systemic patterns that interconnect them. This means that the individual takes his or her unique identity itself as an object of reflection (Pannell, 2021, p. 358; McCauley et al., 2006, p. 638). Individuals operating from this order experience multiple possibilities of the self as a product both of interaction with others and self-assertion (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 638).

In general, as individuals develop through these levels, their self-definition changes from externally defined to internally defined, their interpersonal focus changes from self to others, and their understanding of the world changes from simple to complex (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 422). Kegan (1982) used two internal structures to define each constructive-developmental stage: these structures are called subject and object (as cited in Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 422). Kegan holds that moving an element from subject, meaning objectifying something which was previously subject, for example the affective response to receiving feedback, is beneficial for cognitive development. The reason being that the more one takes as object, the more one can appreciate and understand, and the more complex one's overall outlook becomes (Girgis et al., 2018, p. 3).

The general proposition behind these theories is that an individual's general level of cognitive development should influence his or her effectiveness as a leader (Day & Dragoni, 2015, p. 143). The reason being that the more complex the meaning capabilites, or level of development, the greater capacity the leader has to deal effectively with the complexities of their environment (Day & Dragoni, 2015, p. 143). CDT can therefore be linked to leadership theories, and one way of investigating adult development is through the lens of leader development.

2.2 Leader development

Merriam-Webster defines a leader as a person who has commanding authority or influence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), where leadership is a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Roald, 2015, p. 125). In terms of development, Van Velsor & McCauley (2004) have defined leader development as the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes (p. 2). Ladegard & Gjerde (2014) defines leadership development as an integration strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives (p. 632). It involves drawing meaning to the learning experiences of the leader and how one makes sense of these experiences (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004).

Hence, a critical aspect of leadership is the ability to give and receive help (Schein, 2009, p. 142). One way of receiving help can be through receiving feedback on your performance. In leader development, feedback can function as a source of information for learning and development through facilitating the development of a more accurate understanding of one's competence (Steele et al., 2018, p. 28). Leaders are constantly required to make judgment calls that require an assessment of capabilities, both their own and those of others (Goleman, 2014, p. 4). When leaders learn how to objectively recognize their behaviors and tendencies, they become better at understanding how they relate to others and how others relate to them (Yarborough, 2018, p. 52). Thus, feedback plays an important role in individual behavior and performance, and has long been known to increase performance, as learning through guidance from others is much more effective than blind discovery (Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 251; Steele et al., 2018, p. 28).

In addition to being a complex process which incorporates concrete skills and planning competencies, leadership is also a dynamic, relational activity that relies on the internal compass of the individual leader and their ability to appropriately navigate unpredictable and uncharted situations (Schwartz et. al., 2022, p. 7). An accurate self-assessment is an important ingredient of leadership success in that a willingness to acknowledge one's weaknesses and shortcomings makes it much more likely that he or she can change and improve to better meet organizational challenges that surfaces (Axelrod, 2012, p. 345). Therefore, one of the fundamental components of effective leadership is self-awareness. One way of gaining this self-awareness is through the course of receiving feedback.

2.3 Feedback

Merriam-Webster defines feedback as the transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process back to the original source (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In terms of leadership, The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) defines feedback as information that you give in response to actions you observe in others (Weitzel, 2019, p. 2). Seifert & Yukl (2010) note several specific aspects of the feedback process which is likely to enhance the effects of behavior feedback to leaders: 1) when the feedback is confidential and used solely for developmental purposes; 2) a neutral facilitator helps leaders interpret the feedback; 3) follow-up meetings to discuss the implementation of the feedback; 4) developing specific development goals; 5) having a personal coach, and finally; 6) feedback is provided more than once (p. 857).

Once the goals have been established, leaders may seek additional feedback to assess how others are experiencing their behavior (Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 253). By examining their own behavior over time, the individual can look at the consequences of their own actions and make adjustments that are necessary to reach the goals that have been set (Dembkowski et. al., 2006, p. 56). The feedback should therefore be direct and precise to enable the person receiving the feedback to understand exactly what he or she did in a particular situation and the impact it had on others. As such, CCL uses the term effective feedback, and claims it as inherently developmental (Weitzel, 2019, p. 2). One reason being that it can function as a mirror for the individual, where he or she can observe their own behavior in a more objective manner, and in turn drive them to correct their performance strategies (Dembkowski et. al., 2006, p. 56; Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 251). One means of providing this feedback involves using a 360-degree feedback tool.

2.4 The Leadership Circle Profile

360-degree feedback involves using a systematic approach to procure feedback from a leader's subordinates, peers, and managers (Axelrod, 2012, p. 348). 360-degree feedback primarily seeks to increase a leader's awareness of themselves so that the leader may improve how he or she relates to and interacts with others (Atwater and Waldman, 1998a, as cited in Harris & Kuhnert, 2008, p. 51). Using a tool based on 360-degree feedback has emerged as the primary tool in the efforts to foster leader self-awareness (Axelrod, 2012, p. 348). If used as intended, it can help leaders systematically understand the impact of their behavior on others and give them space to hone the most important tool in their leadership arsenal; themselves (Day et. al., 2014, p. 70; Schwartz et. al., 2022, p. 7).

An example of such a tool is The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP). The Leadership Circle Profile is designed to measure behavior and assumptions simultaneously. In this way, it connects patterns of leadership behavior with habits of thoughts (Anderson, 2006, p. 176). Such a dynamic picture of the self obtained through feedback is therefore valuable in helping the leader identify new opportunities for change in addition to highlighting areas ripe for development (Axelrod, 2012, p. 349).
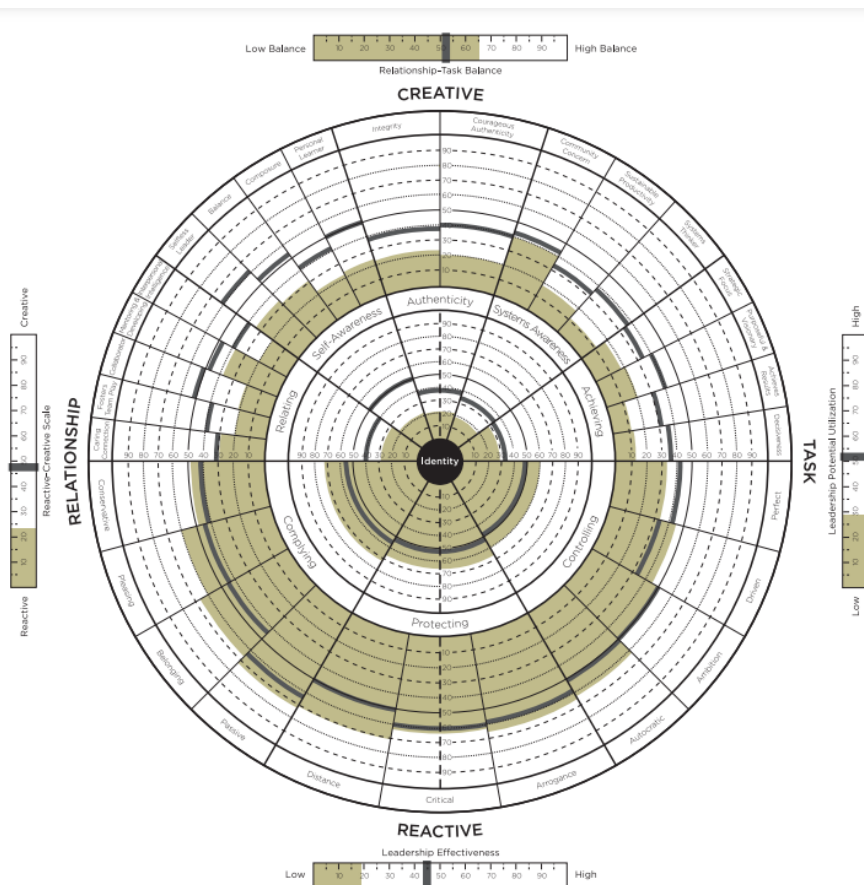

Fig. 1.: Example of a TLCP (Anderson, 2023, p. 8).

Figure 1 shows a graphic representation of feedback in a TLCP report. The profile is split into two top and bottom orientations, *reactive* and *creative*. In the creative orientation, leaders are primarily focused on what they want and how they can achieve good results. In the reactive orientation, on the other hand, they are more focused on problem resolution. In turn, they are reacting against the problem, and instead focus on relieving the stress, anxiety, and inner conflict that the problem is causing (Anderson, 2006, p. 177).

The model is split halfway vertically, whereas the right is labelled *task* and the left is labelled *relationship*. All dimensions on the right half tend to be more focused on getting things done: achieving results, making decisions, redesigning systems, and managing change. The left half has more to do with relationships between individuals, teams, and with oneself (Anderson, 2006, p. 178). Dimensions that are opposite each other on the Circle are opposite theoretically, behaviorally, and statistically (Anderson, 2006, p. 179). For example, *relating* is opposite *controlling.* Under these umbrella dimensions, the circle is further split into 29 more specific areas correlating with the different dimensions. These areas contain traits like *arrogance, integrity,* and *vision*. At the core you have the identity which all these areas and dimensions stem from.

Furthermore, relating to Kegan's CDT model, stages three and four correspond respectively to the *reactive* (level 3) and *creative* (level 4) orientations described above (Lawrence, 2016, p. 126; McCauley et al., 2006, p. 634-638; Pannell, 2021, p. 357-359; Reams, 2014, p. 123-138; Anderson, 2006, p. 178). TLCP is also a tool for gaining knowledge about your own leadership practice. This knowledge can enhance your self-awareness, which is crucial for leader development (Day et. al., 2014, p. 71). Giving 360-feedback to a leader could therefore be one method of promoting this awareness (Axelrod, 2012, p. 349).

2.5 Self-awareness

The dimension of self-awareness focuses on the development of awareness of what is going on in one's own interior (Jordan, 2001, p. 1). Self-awareness is based upon two independent concepts, namely the self and awareness. Carden et. al. (2022) argue that the self is multidimensional in nature and made up of both conscious and unconscious layers, which in turn is informed by observations of others (p. 143). As the self is multi-layered, so is awareness, and should also encompass the recognition of others' feelings and one's impact on others (Carden et. al., 2022, p. 143). In combination, these two concepts make up self-awareness, and means having a deep understanding of your own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives (Goleman, 2014, p. 4). Instead of being the victim of one's habitual behavioural patterns, emotions, desires and thoughts, a sophisticated level of self-awareness means that there is a locus of witnessing in consciousness that can make the behaviours, emotions, desires and thoughts into objects of attention (Jordan, 2001, p. 1). A person with a high degree of self-awareness is therefore honest with themselves and those around them, and knows how their feelings affect them, those around them and their job performance (Goleman, 2014, p. 4).

Furthermore, the concept of self-awareness can be perceived to have two dimensions, subjective self-awareness, where you focus on external events, and objective self-awareness, which is focused upon the self (Carden et. al., 2022, p. 143). This approach initiates a comparison against self-developed standards and can lead to rumination and

negative thoughts. As self-awareness may lead to rumination, it can be perceived as negative, but there is an alternative viewpoint which distinguishes rumination from reflection (Carden et. al., 2022, p. 144). This reflection may be perceived as positive as it can help provide a route to learning (Kolb, 1984, as cited in Carden et. al., 2022, p. 144). Self-awareness is therefore often included in leadership development programs and is often measured with tools such as TLCP (Carden et. al., 2022, p. 144). Leaders with a high degree of self-awareness are also reported to be associated with leader effectiveness (Harris & Kuhnert, 2008, p. 59-60). In addition, self-awareness extends not only to the leader's ability to assess their own goals and values but also where they are in relation to these goals (Goleman, 2014, p. 4).

As in CDT, development of self-awareness can be conceived as a stage-like process (Jordan, 2001, p. 1). Kegan (1982, 1994) uses the formulation that what has been subject in one stage of development becomes object of consciousness in the next stage (as cited in Jordan, 2001, p. 1). Jordan (2001) describes these stages as first developing a witnessing self, where you can objectify contents of your inner processes. In this way, you can witness what is going on inside you without being free from the pressing forces of emotions, desires, impulses, and mental interpretations. The second stage involves having a witness self that can start to relate actively to the coming and going of emotions, desires, and thoughts. This is a self that can recognize that a certain emotion has been evoked but is free to make decisions about what to do with the emotion. The third stage is reached when the self-sense can relocate from embeddedness in the ego processes to the witness self-position (p. 1-2).

This reflective self-awareness process can therefore result in increased learning from leadership experiences, a greater self-understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses as a leader and can subsequently contribute to promoting leader development (Steele et al., 2018, p. 19). In turn, it can facilitate an increase in the cognitive development of the ability to create meaning from feedback, where the leader is able to assess self-generated and external feedback for relevant improvement of performance (Steele et al., 2018, p. 19). Enhancing self-awareness can therefore help leaders focus on their strengths as well as areas that need improvement (Allen et. al., 2000, as cited in Harris & Kuhnert, 2008, p. 51). However, while getting feedback is an important step in leader development, it can also result in affective reactions for the individual on the receiving end.

2.6 Affective effect of receiving feedback

In a study by Smither et al. (2008), the recipients of feedback described three types of emotions: positive, negative, and motivational. Positive emotions included pleased, proud, happy, encouraged, grateful, and elated. The negative emotion scale included angry, frustrated, unhappy, discouraged, and disappointed. The third scale represented motivation and included informed, motivated, aware, enlightened, and inspired (p. 208).

While feedback can be viewed as both positive and negative, either type is evaluative information which directly references the self, and therefore it is inherently affective (Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 254). A crucial aspect of self-awareness is recognizing an emotion as it happens and interpreting its adaptive importance (Looma, 2003, p. 220). However, if the participants were to receive any negative feedback, a study by Smither et. al. (2008) found that nine months after leaders received behavioral feedback,

they were more inclined to remember strengths rather than weaknesses, which could have indicated areas of improvement (p. 215). On the other hand, studies done by Baumeister and Cairns (1992) showed how individuals processed and remembered negative feedback. They found that the highest memory scores in their experiment were obtained for the small amount of negative feedback embedded in the generally positive feedback. Another study found that negative feedback had a stronger effect on students' perceptions of their own performance than positive feedback (as cited in Smither et al., 2008, p. 203). Higher-level employees are also found to be more likely to have an inflated view of their performance and less congruence with the perceptions of others who work with them (Sala, 2003, p. 225).

People may therefore react differently to negative feedback, and little change is likely to occur unless a person is willing to acknowledge deficiencies indicated by the feedback (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). Baumeister et. al. (2001) has concluded that negative feedback is processed more thoroughly than positive, and that one is more motivated to avoid negative self-definitions than to pursue positive ones (p. 323). As a result, individuals may avoid seeking negative feedback as it can be seen as ego-threatening (Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 254). However, the tendency to avoid negative feedback probably does not indicate any lack of strength on the part of the individual. It may reflect a tendency to want to shield the self from the negative impact, such as a potential loss of self-esteem (Baumeister et. al., 2001, p. 342). Negative feedback is therefore more likely to be accepted and applied by someone with strong self-confidence and emotional maturity (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). Additionally, a willingness to seek negative feedback is associated with more accurate knowledge of how others view their work, and thus, leaders who are willing to seek negative feedback should be better equipped for tracking progress with regards to their goals (Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 271). In other words, how effective feedback can be also relies on personal characteristics, perhaps because behavior is a function of personality, or what people do is a function of who they are (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 423).

Regardless, Carden et. al. (2022) note that the 360-review may need to be supported by one-to-one coaching when there are discrepancies between self-evaluations and the evaluations of others, so that the leader can process and accept this information and the emotional responses they might ignite (p. 166). On way of doing this can be through leadership coaching.

2.7 Leadership coaching

Coaching is a tool commonly used by people to develop their self-awareness, professional skills and knowledge that is needed (Podolchak et. al., 2019, p. 108). The very purpose of coaching is to help bring people closer towards their developmental potential (Lawrence, 2016, p. 122). In addition, it has the power to improve job performance of employees and their personal growth (Podolchak et. al., 2019, p. 108). Coaching has therefore been determined as the core feature of personal and professional development which can enhance knowledge and skillful use of the leadership approaches (Podolchak et. al., 2019, p. 107).

Leadership coaching involves one-on-one counselling of executives, leaders, and managers about work-related issues with the purpose of improving their leadership

effectiveness (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014, p. 632). The coaching process is custom tailored to the individual, and involves certain core elements: feedback, challenge, and support (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014, p. 633). Leaders who have received feedback in addition to coaching have also reported a positive development of leadership skills, increased self-confidence in their leadership and show more creativity and innovation, greater self-awareness and generally a greater degree of meaningful interactions with their employees (Spears-Jones et al., 2021, p. 4). Furthermore, leadership coaching should be focused on the specific leader development goals and the actions necessary for achieving these goals (Yarborough, 2018, p. 50). When the leader through feedback learns to relate to their own behavior in a more objective way and recognize their own behavior patterns, they will be better equipped to apply this knowledge and thereby increase their own self-awareness (Yarborough, 2018, p. 52).

I have now presented the theoretical framework the thesis is built on. I will now turn my attention to the methodological choices done to frame my research.

3. Methodology

In this chapter I will describe methodological choices made with the purpose of exploring how feedback might function in leader development. In short, I will begin by describing some general theoretical perceptions of qualitative research, before I will explain the scientific theory which supports my thesis work. Then, I will describe the process of gathering my research data, before I will assess the quality of my thesis work. Lastly, I will reflect upon ethical concerns relevant to my thesis.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research usually focuses on the meaning of real-life events, not just the occurrence of them (Yin, 2011, p. 93). Qualitative methods are therefore most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the participant sees the world (McCracken, 1988, p. 10). Silverman (2020) claims that qualitative research is about investigating people's experiences and involves verbal descriptions of real-life situations (p. 3-6). In other words, qualitative methods aim to gather information about meanings and experiences which cannot be statistically numbered (Dalland, 2020, p. 54). Qualitative research is therefore about investigating, documenting, analysing, and interpreting how people construct and add meaning to their experiences (Azungah, 2018, s. 384).

Dalland (2020) distinguishes several criteria as hallmarks for qualitative research, some of which are depth, closeness, understanding and interpersonal relationship. Depth, through thoroughly investigating the participant's experienced phenomena; closeness, through investigating in direct contact with the field; understanding, through trying to understand how these experiences influence the participant; and through an interpersonal relationship between researcher and participant (p. 55). In this way, the qualitative method provides the researcher an opportunity to delve into and uncover underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values of the participant (Azungah, 2018, p. 384). If the researcher is concerned with exploring people's life-histories or everyday behaviour, then qualitative methods may be favoured (Silverman, 2020, p. 8). Seeing as I want to explore the phenomenological experience of getting feedback, I found it only natural to choose a qualitative research method for my thesis.

3.2 Scientific theory

3.2.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is originally and essentially a philosophical discipline established by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s (Van Manen, 2016, p. 22; Spencer et. al., 2014, p. 88). It is rooted in the notion that all our knowledge and understanding of the world comes from our experiences (Spencer et. al., 2014, p. 88). Husserl argued that phenomenology was the foundation for all sciences, and sought to clarify, through reflection and description, the constitution of knowledge through consciousness (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 4). To do phenomenological research therefore entails to question what the reality of a given phenomenon is like for the person involved (Van Manen, 1990, p. 42).

Understanding phenomenology, however, can be a complex undertaking. Other philosophers have also urged that philosophy should find a way of making phenomenology more accessible to professional researchers who would be interested in phenomenology but who do not possess a strong and deep professional philosophical background (Van Manen, 2016, p. 19). Since I find myself in this category, my phenomenological approach to my thesis was simply trying to make my participants' experiences available in their consciousness and in turn making them available to me through the process of gathering and analysing the data. In my thesis I achieved this by making use of the interpretative phenomenological analysis method, in which phenomenology is deeply rooted.

3.2.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore how the participants are making sense of their real-life experiences, and the main goal of an IPA-study is the meaning that these experiences hold for the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). In IPA research, our attempts to understand other people's understanding of their experiences are necessarily interpretive and will focus on their attempts to make meaning out of it (Smith et. al., 2009, p. 21). The IPA method therefore is connected to hermeneutics (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Smith et. al. (2009) describes hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation (p. 21). IPA recognises that this is an interpretative endeavour because humans are sense-making organisms (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 1). The method is therefore concerned with examining how a phenomenon appears for the participant, while the researcher is attempting to make sense of this appearance. One way of doing this is through an inductive approach.

3.2.3 Inductive approach

Since IPA produces an account of lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions, the method coincides with having an inductive approach (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 1; Smith et. al., 2009, p. 31). Inductive approaches contrast with deductive approaches, as the two reflect in different ways of shifting between data and concepts (Yin, 2011, p. 94). The deductive approach uses an organizing framework comprising of themes for the coding process, while the inductive approach involves working exclusively from the participant's experiences that drive the analysis entirely (Azungah, 2018, p. 391). In other words, the inductive approaches tend to let the data lead to the emergence of theoretical concepts, while deductive approaches tend to let the theoretical concepts lead to the definition of what is relevant data (Yin, 2011, p. 94). An inductive approach entails going through data line by line thoroughly and assigning codes to paragraphs or segments of texts as concepts unfold relevant to the research questions (Azungah, 2018, p. 391). Choosing a deductive approach can be timesaving, since you already have an idea of what you are looking for. The inductive approach, however, is a recursive process that involves moving back and forth between data analysis and the literature to make meaning out of emerging concepts (Azungah, 2018, p. 391). Taking an inductive approach therefore leaves the thesis open for the most interesting findings, which is why I chose to go that route. However, in order to put the IPA method of analysis to use, I needed data which I could actually analyse.

3.3 Gathering of data

3.3.1 Research site and recruitment

In conducting IPA research, selecting participants should be done based on that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study (Smith, 2009, p. 49). During the semester, I have attended a leadership course which all the participants attended. This gave me an in to work with something relating to my general field of interest, while also gaining access to potential participants for my research. I then joined my supervisor in his leadership classes spread over four days during the spring semester, which gave me insight into the processes the participants were participating in.

Another criterion for recruiting eligible participants should also be that they for various reasons are able to speak in a reflective manner about these topics (Tjora, 2011, p. 128). Seeing as this was a course taught independently from my research, I trusted that by accepting my invitation to be interviewed, the participants were first of all willing, but also eligible just by the simple fact that they were already enrolled in a course which relied heavily upon self-reflection. Gaining information through observing the classes therefore made it easier recruiting eligible participants, as they had direct experience with the phenomena under study through their course work. By recruiting participants who had known knowledge on the topic in question was therefore a strategic move on my part (Dalland, 2020, p. 79).

Regarding sample size, between three and six participants is believed to be a reasonable number for a student project such as a master's thesis (Smith, 2009, p. 51). Even though Smith (2009) recommends three as the default size for a masters-level IPA study, my goal was five participants. I did not want to be on the lower end of the scale, as I wanted to make sure I got enough data to analyse if something were to go wrong. During the first class I was trying to map out who were eligible for interviews, based on my criteria. I wanted participants who were engaged, inhabited a leadership position, and was based in the local area, as I wanted to conduct the interviews in person.

3.3.2 Selection of participants

In sourcing my participants, I designed an interest form where the attendants of the leadership course could sign up if they were interested in participating. The interest form can be found under Appendix A. I then contacted five eligible candidates from that interest form to see if they wanted to participate in my research project. They have all chosen their own names for anonymity purposes:

Amalie
Currently between jobs. She will be starting her new job in sales this spring, where she will be working on different projects.

Frøya
Physiotherapist with a counselling position who works with leaders in her field.

Sara
Department manager with eight to ten employees.

Jenny
Department manager with seven employees.

Emma
Works in the staffing industry, where she is responsible for remote management of personnel working on projects.

Luckily, they all said yes, and I now had five candidates ready to be interviewed.

3.3.3 Qualitative interview

The method is the tool we use when dealing with the theme we want to investigate (Dalland, 2020, p. 54). In doing IPA research, certain methods for collecting and analysing data are preferred (Smith, 2009, p.40). One of these methods is the qualitative interview. Within qualitative research, the qualitative interview is usually referred to as some form of conversation with a purpose (Mason, 2002, p. 225). Qualitative interviews can be seen as a construction site for knowledge, with mutual learning simultaneously taking place between the participant and the researcher conducting the interview (Kvale, 1996, p. 14). The purpose is therefore to gather descriptions of the participant's real-life experiences to interpret the meaning of these descriptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 3). These descriptions were what I was trying to get access to, hence the choice of method, as I deemed it most appropriate in terms of my research goals. In the words of the philosopher Rom Harré: "the primary human reality happens in conversation" (Harré, 1983, p. 58). Now I needed to choose what form of interview I wanted to use.

Brinkmann (2014) outlines three forms of qualitative interviews: unstructured, structured, and semi-structured (p. 285). On the one end of the spectrum, Ryen (2017) describes the unstructured interview as almost a normal conversation (p. 15), meaning that the interviews should be relaxed encounters with the interviewer making efforts to put the participant at ease (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, s. 49). Through this non-directive approach the interviewer takes a more passive role where he or she tries to value the participant's private experiences, stories, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 281). This was in line with what I wanted to gain insight into, however, based on my limited research experience I needed a method which gave some structure to lean on.

As a counterweight to the unstructured interview, Brinkmann (2014) outlines the structured interview (p. 286). Generally, the researcher decides in advance what constitutes required data and constructs questions in order to elicit answers corresponding to predetermined categories (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 57). This would have provided me with more structure but seeing as I wanted to explore what the participant experienced, I found this method to be too controlling, and in turn could act as a hindrance to what I wanted to achieve with my research.

Somewhere in the middle you have semi-structured interviews, which is probably the most widespread form of interviews in the human and social sciences (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 286). Semi-structured interviews share the same conversational tone as the unstructured interview, but more in line with the structured interview the interviewer controls the conversation to a greater extent by using themes and keywords that have been prepared

in advance (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 50; Ryen, 2017, p. 15). However, compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can allow more leeway to follow up on what is considered important by the participant and thus getting closer to what the participant deems important. This allowed me the opportunity to make discoveries which went beyond previous discoveries or assumptions (Joffe, 2011, p. 210). I also found this method to be a good compromise between structured and unstructured interviews, gaining the best of both worlds as it provided some structure to lean on, while still facilitating rapport and flexibility while still being able to produce rich data (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 59).

I now had chosen the preferred method of interviewing. Over the semester I had also been observing the classes of the leadership course. By doing that I gained insight into what my participants experienced from the *outside*, or what can be referred to as an *etic* perspective (Azungah, 2018, p. 385). What I wanted to achieve through interviewing was to gain insight into what they had experienced from the *inside,* or what can be referred to as an *emic* perspective (Azungah, 2018, p. 386). Simons (2009) also observed that interviews permit research participants to reveal more than can be detected or reliably assumed from observing a situation (p. 43). To gain more insight into my research topic I would therefore need to start preparing my interviews. With these observations in mind, I had a good starting point for developing my interview guide to provide rich descriptions of the experiences made by the participants, all from an *emic* perspective.

3.3.4 Interview guide and structure

An interview guide is a form with questions prepared in advance which should help the researcher to structure the interview to ensure that the researcher covers all topics and questions which he or she is investigating (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 46). Through these questions the participants are invited to converse about the real-life experiences and descriptions from their own lives (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 50). Forming an interview guide is also a way of preparing both academically and mentally for meeting your participant (Dalland, 2020, p. 83).

In preparing my interview guide I had through the observations made during the leadership course a good starting point for outlining topics relevant to my research questions. I wanted open-ended questions, as the more open the interview setting is, the bigger the chance of getting spontaneous, vivid, and unexpected answers (Dalland, 2020, p. 83). On the other hand, the more structured the interview setting is, the easier it gets to analyse the interview afterward (Dalland, 2020, p. 83). However, the degree of structure should be based upon what you are researching as well as who you are interviewing (Ryen, 2017, p. 97). Seeing as I wanted to gain knowledge about how the participant's experienced getting feedback, but still wanted to maintain some structure to contain both myself and my participant, I chose the semi-structured interview. This is because I find the balance between structure and informality the best way of gaining insight into my research theme, making room for the spontaneous while still being prepared enough to make sure I cover the most important topics.

The aims set by IPA researchers tend to focus upon people's experiences and understandings of particular phenomena (Smith, 2009, p. 46). My interview guide needed to reflect this. I formed questions concerned with the experiential significance of the thing

that was happening, which is the centre of gravity for IPA studies (Smith, 2019, p. 168). Regarding length of the interview, for adult, articulate participants, between six to ten open questions, along with possible prompts, will yield 45 to 90 minutes of conversation (Smith, 2009, p. 60). Seeing as I wanted the interview to last around the hour mark, I aimed for six open questions, each with their set of prompts to spur further reflections if needed. In building my block of questions for my interview guide, I followed some procedural steps outlined by Smith (2009). In short, the steps taken was first to identify the broader topic of interest, in this case the experience of getting feedback, before tackling the range of topic areas. Then arranging the topic areas in the most appropriate sequence and phrasing them in an open manner. Finally, it is recommended to discuss it with someone else (p. 61). Before conducting the interview, I therefore discussed it with a fellow student before presenting it to my supervisor which then gave me the green light to follow through. The interview guide can be found under Appendix B. Armed with an interview guide I was now ready for conducting interviews.

3.3.5 Interviewing

Inherent to the IPA model is the notion of a person as a self-reflexive, sense-making individual who is interpreting his or her engagement with the world (Smith, 2019, p. 167). It is important that the researcher allow the participant to tell his or her own story on his or her own terms (McCracken, 1988, p. 11). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher usually phrases his or her questions in a form that is open-ended to provide rich and detailed answers from the participant (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 47). I assured this through exercising more open-ended questions, where the participants got an opportunity to reveal their perspectives on the topic of study without me imposing on them any prejudices and opinions I was withholding (Azungah, 2018, p. 384). Beyond asking questions, I therefore tried keeping my verbal input to a minimum, other than showing my interest with subtle verbal affirmations.

I had now conducted five interviews and produced just under five hours of recorded material. The next step was to transcribe and analyse the procured data.

3.3.6 Transcribing and analysing

In analysing the data gathered from the interviews I made use of the IPA method which I presented in section 3.2.2. IPA is especially valuable when examining topics which are complex, ambiguous, and emotionally laden (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 2). Seeing as receiving feedback based on your performance might evoke strong emotions, I found the IPA method to be a preferred method of choice. Furthermore, in IPA it is assumed that the data can tell us something about the participant's involvement in the world and how they make sense of it. This requires the researcher to identify, describe and understand the aspects of the participant's account (Smith, 2009, p. 46).

To procure this, I followed the steps outlined by Smith (2008). First, I transcribed the whole interview, including my questions. This was transcribed at a semantic level, meaning that all the words spoken, including sounds made and other features, were transcribed. In analysing the transcribed material, I was interested in learning something about the participants psychological world. First, I started looking for themes by reading the

transcripts several times to get familiar with the material and noting potential themes and their emerging theme titles. These themes were then listed, and I started looking for connections between them. After finding these connections, I started clustering the themes together before I made a table of themes organized after emergent topics (p. 65-70). These procedural steps were made for each of the conducted interviews.

In total I ended up with 49 pages of transcribed material. This material was imported into the coding program NVivo for analysis. In NVivo I then went through each interview and assigned codes to interesting finds. In total I assigned 37 unique codes throughout all five interviews. I then started narrowing these down, looking for commonalities between them. Sifting through the material, some of these commonalities made themselves clear to me and the themes emerged while working through the research data. In total I ended up with five categories which I found most interesting. These five categories will be presented in chapter 4. Before that I will assess the quality of my thesis.

3.4 The quality of the thesis

3.4.1 Validity

Validity means trustworthiness or credibility and concerns the consistency and credibility of the research results (Dalland, 2020, p. 246). In relation to quantitative methods, interviews can be considered unreliable, as authenticity is considered more important than the number of participants, meaning that it is more important to gain an authentic insight into the experience of the respondent rather than the size of the participant group (Silverman, 2020, p. 47). However, that is also part of the purpose, as the goal is precisely that, an authentic insight into the experiences of the participant. That was the intention behind my choice of method, to get an authentic insight into the participant's world. Dalen (2011) suggests that a first step to ensure validity will be that the researcher explicitly accounts for his or her connection to the phenomenon being studied. In that way, the reader can get an idea of how this relationship to the field may have influenced the results (p. 94). I have done this in section 3.3.1, by describing my field of research and how I was connected to it.

Furthermore, Lucy Yardley (2000) presents four broad principles dealing with the quality of qualitative research (p. 179-183). I will present them and note how I have dealt with each of them over the duration of my research project. The first principle is *sensitivity to context* and can be showed by having an appreciation for the interactional nature of the interview, through being empathetic and by putting the participant at ease (Yardley, 2000, p. 180). I have dealt with this by showing good interview behaviour outlined in section 3.6, and by having an understanding for what they are going through by having observed it. The next principle presented by Yardley is *commitment and rigour*. Commitment in the form of showing attentiveness to the participant both during the interview and in the handling of the data produced, and rigour in the form of the thoroughness of the study, for example the appropriateness of research participants in relation to the topic of study, the quality of the interview and completeness of analysis (Yardley, 2000, p. 181). I have dealt with this through being thorough in the planning stages, by following procedural steps in constructing my interview guide and by following guides for transcribing and analysing the recorded material. The third principal deals with transparency and refers to how the stages of research are described in the report (Yardley, 2000, p. 182). I have

ensured this by being transparent in how I have planned and conducted my research, and by including forms and planning documents in the attachment section of my thesis. The final principle presented by Yardley is *impact and importance* and deals with the notion of that the real test of validity lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important, or useful (Yardley, 2000, p. 183). How well I fared in operating under this principle I will leave up to you, the reader.

However, validity within the research field therefore partly deals with assessing the findings these insights produce, and if the findings are answering the questions we are researching (p. 179). If the study is interesting, important, or useful is partly subjective, however, a valid study should at least be one that has properly collected and interpreted its data, so that the conclusions made accurately reflect and represent the real world and phenomena that was studied (Yin, 2011, p. 78). To secure this, I have accounted for strategies made to both collect and analyse my research data, in addition to using the participants own words in my presentation of findings. In addition, I have also tried to ensure validity through explaining my theoretical point of view and how my reflexivity may have influenced interpretations and findings (Dalland, 2020, p. 246). On the notion of reflexivity, I will now describe my role as a researcher.

3.4.2 Researcher role and reflexivity

To strengthen the project's validity, it is therefore important to reflect on one's own connection to the project (Tjora, 2011, p. 176). In other words, who speaks for whom, and when, as all understanding is determined by a pre-understanding (Adkins, 2002, p. 332; Dalen, 2011, p. 16). An important link in strengthening the project's validity therefore means reflecting on the researcher's reflexivity. To uncover this reflexivity, the researcher must first understand the assumptions and the biases he or she brings to the research (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 88). My connection to the research site has been through observing their classes before conducting my interviews. I therefore had an understanding of what they had gone through, which also brought some assumptions with it. These assumptions were based on the participants TLCP-reports and how I assumed that they felt must while receiving them. Being aware of these assumptions while interviewing was important, as I did not want to be hindered by the fact that I subconsciously was looking for confirmation that my assumptions were correct. Awareness of one's own preconceptions is therefore important because the researcher will then be more sensitive when it comes to seeing opportunities in his or her own interview material (Dalen, 2011, p. 16).

Furthermore, in qualitative research, the investigator serves as a kind of "instrument" (McCracken, 1988, p. 8). Yin (2011) uses this metaphor as a tool for collecting data. Think of a ruler, a compass, or a thermometer (p. 122). This metaphor is useful because it emphasizes that the researcher is often using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect to gain insight into the research topic (McCracken, 1988, p. 8). Being enrolled in the master's programme MRÅD at NTNU, I already had acquired knowledge on counselling and communication techniques which I could rely on in my interviews. However, by being the prime research instrument, it requires that the researcher is aware of potential biases or idiosyncrasies, as these measurement errors can cause damage to the project's validity (Yin, 2011, p. 123). As a way of combatting this, the first objective for building trustworthiness and credibility is that the research gets done

in a publicly accessible manner, meaning that the researcher describes and documents the research procedures so that the reader can review and try to understand them (Yin, 2011, p. 19). I therefore made sure to act on the principles of Yardley outlined in the previous section, especially regarding the principle of transparency (Yardley, 2000, p. 182).

Furthermore, using the IPA method for research requires the researcher to be open-minded, flexible, patient, empathetic and finally a willingness to enter the participant's world (Smith, 2009, p. 55). In my research I have striven to achieve this through Yardley's principle of sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000, p. 180).

3.4.3 Generalizability

There have been ongoing discussions regarding the need for generalizing qualitative research (Tjora, 2011, p. 180). McCracken (1988) claims that one cannot draw quantitative conclusions from qualitative work (p. 8). Tjora (2011), however, expresses sympathy for the view that qualitative research should lean towards a form of conceptual generalizability, where the goal is to gain insight into a phenomenon, and test this insight in the form of a conceptual or theoretical development (p. 180). However, in certain projects you can discard the need for generalizing. If the goal is to deeply investigate a phenomenon as it is experienced by the participant and the need for generalizability is not a priority in the research (Tjora, 2011, p. 184). This has been the case for my project, as I was more interested how getting feedback was experienced by the individual participant, rather than how getting feedback is experienced on a general basis.

Furthermore, McCracken (1988) claims that the purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many people share a certain characteristic. How many people hold these categories and assumptions is simply not a compelling issue. It is the categories and assumptions, not those who hold them, that matter (p. 7). Gaining large quantities of data which could be generalized into statistics was not my goal. I therefore chose fewer participants with the aim of getting an authentic insight into the experience they were having. My thesis therefore leans more towards a form of naturalistic generalization, where in the research I strived to explain the details of what had been studied well enough so that the reader can assess for himself whether the findings can be found to be valid or not (Tjora, 2011, p. 181).

3.5 Ethical reflections

Ethics refers to moral principles that form the basis of the actions we take (Thompson & Chambers, 2011, p. 24). Regarding research the Norwegian National research ethics committees outlines several principles for research: respect, which entails treating all participants in the research project with respect; good consequences, which entails making sure that the outcome is good, and if not, that the consequences are bearable; justice, which entails making sure that the research project is fairly designed and executed; and integrity, which entails that the researcher is obliged to follow recognized norms and to act responsibly, openly and honestly towards participant and the public (De nasjonale forskningsetiske kommiteene, 2019). I have followed these principles to the best of my ability. Additionally, this research project has also been approved by Sikt. The approval can be found under Appendix D. Still, there are potential pitfalls one might encounter while

conducting qualitative research. I will outline three potential ethical problems that may arise during the research and how I dealt with them.

3.5.1 Ethical issues

The first potential ethical problem is the researcher/participant relationship (Orb et. al., 2001, p. 94). The interview situation can create a situation of intimacy and encourage disclosure (Leahy, 2022, p. 782). Therefore, common advice on good interview behavior includes emphasizing honesty, being natural, calm, and supportive, non-threatening as well as attentive and interested (Ryen, 2017, s. 117). During my interviews I tried upholding these values as a compass for my interview behaviour. Some of it, like being attentive, interested, and supportive have also been done through engaged body language, smiles, and eye contact, since I wanted to uphold the notion of keeping my verbal input to a minimum as mentioned in section 3.3.5.

The second potential ethical problem is the researcher's subjective interpretation (Orb et. al., 2001, p. 94). This is an important factor as a qualitative study is first considered credible only when it presents an accurate interpretation of the experiences of those who have experienced it (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). Therefore, I spent a lot of time on transcriptions and writing the final report focused on using the participants' own words, as strategies to strengthen the validity of the research project, but also to preserve the ethical principles of the Norwegian National research ethics committees (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 153; De nasjonale forskningsetiske kommiteene, 2019).

The last potential ethical problem is regarding the project design itself (Orb et. al., 2001, p. 94). Leahy (2022) claims that the bulk of the explicit ethics is carried out before the interview is even conducted. Ethical issues that must be considered before interviews includes the conceptual framework and research questions of a project, inviting participation, selecting participants, and designing interview questions (p. 780), all of which must be done with the mentioned ethical principles in mind. Therefore, ethical concerns have been addressed in the planning stages of this thesis. More specifically concerns regarding planning, consent, transparency, and anonymity, all of which have been addressed in other chapters.

3.5.2 Informed consent and anonymity

Research participants have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments in which they are involved (Christians, 2011, p. 65). In qualitative research, and IPA research in particular, informed consent must be gained. The consent form used in this thesis can be found under Appendix C.

As qualitative researchers, anonymity is all that can be offered, as opposed to full confidentiality. The reasoning behind this is that to say that something is confidential means that no one else will see it, which is not the case (Smith, 2009, p. 53). Anonymity, however, is still an important ethical concern. Steps to make sure that the anonymity has been assured in this thesis is among others anonymising the course name and by using fictional names in my interviews. These were chosen by my participants and used

throughout the interview process and in handling the interview data, both in transcribing, analysing and finally, in this thesis.

Lastly, it is also important to point out that the ethical guidelines are not only limited to the fieldwork, but the entire research process from start to finish (Ryen, 2017, s. 207). In other words, I have tried keeping these ethical concerns in mind through all stages of my research including planning, executing, and in handling my research data, and finally in the writing of my report.

I have now presented the methodological choices done to secure my research data. In the next chapter I will present the findings.

4. Presentation of findings

In this chapter I will present the data material gathered relevant for my thesis. The data has been collected by interviewing five individuals composed of leaders going through a leadership course about their experience of receiving feedback as one of the course tasks. In conducting the interviews, I got the impression that the experience of receiving feedback is different for everyone. Some spanning over the course of the semester through getting exposed to the course material, while others started their journey several years ago during challenging times in their life, both of which have influenced their experience of being involved in a feedback process. The common denominator, however, was that they all had an experience receiving their feedback, and that these experiences had both commonalities and differences.

The chapter contains five categories representing the themes which emerged in my analysis of the interview data. They are structured with the intention of creating a narrative in the participants' experience. The findings are, however, a product of my interpretation of their meanings. To substantiate this, I will under each theme present statements gathered from the participants during the interview sessions. To make it clear to the reader who says what, the citations from the participants are presented in italics. Under each category, I will make a short introduction to the theme explored through the findings. Each category also includes a short summary in addition to an introduction to what main points will be taken into chapter 5. Not all participants are represented in each category, but rather those who had interesting musings on the topic at hand.

The first category contains some of the assumptions harbored withing the participants beforehand, and further describes how leaders may experience a high degree of self-criticism and have a fear of being perceived as arrogant. The second category recounts how receiving feedback can create an emotional response which alters the perception the leaders have of themselves. The third category describes how processing your feedback can help you get a clearer view of your feedback results. The fourth category focuses on future endeavors and how getting positive feedback can help the leader build confidence in their leadership abilities and in turn help them gain momentum. The fifth and final category revolves around the value of feedback and is meant to summarize the experience of the participants.

4.1 Leaders may experience a high degree of self-criticism

This category describes the self-criticism inhabited by the participants and the inherent fear of thinking you are better than you actually are. Three out of five participants explicitly noted that they had scored themselves more critically than their co-workers did. Amalie told me in her interview that she *"thought that I had been quite generous with myself"*, but the results said otherwise, and upon reflection that *"maybe I didn't dare to think of myself as the effective leader I actually am"*. She continues by saying that *"maybe I have underestimated myself"*. A Norwegian term relevant to this is *janteloven*, which describes exactly that; *don't act like you are something which you are not*. For Jenny, this was something which was prevalent and which she highlights quite clearly:

Because it's not like that, let's say Norwegians, we don't say things like that to each other. So, getting regular drips like that during the workday, well, we would all believe we were world champions!

Jenny is talking about receiving compliments and positive feedback, and how she appreciated getting it through her TLCP. However, there is an undertone of perceiving it as something negative, as too much of it would result in a feeling of arrogance and acting as a self-proclaimed world champion. A testament to this is what she describes as *"having a fear of scoring myself too high"*. She continues by saying that while she still had that fear, she also did not score herself intentionally with that in mind, and that this was *"how I genuinely thought when scoring myself"*. She states further that:

I didn't expect to score myself so low, but maybe expected it to be somewhat consistent [with the others [...] They score me much higher on, I thought they were going to score me not so high on the creative side. One of the categories there was quite high, and of course, it felt nice.

In receiving these results, Jenny was faced with the fact that she had been very strict in scoring herself as opposed to how the others scored her. She expresses this in saying that *"I might not have realized that. I know I'm strict with myself, but, that it would be so bad"*.

Sara also notes that *"I have been very strict with myself"* in scoring herself. Especially in the *reactive* category of the TLCP, which is usually regarded as negative traits. She highlights this through saying that *"I scored myself higher on the reactive part"*, alluding to the fact that the other participants in her report scored her lower than she did herself. While scoring herself higher in the *reactive* part, which she regards as more negative, she scored herself lower than the others in the *creative* part, which she regards as more positive. This is stated more clearly in her reflections after:

I was a bit surprised, because it didn't quite match how I think I see myself, but based on the results, I scored myself high on arrogance [...] and quite high in the reactive part, and quite low in the creative part.

She continues by saying that *"sometimes you score yourself high on what you are afraid to be perceived as"*. Amalie also alluded to that this was something which she observed in other students as well in pointing out that *"the few I have spoken to have said that they have been incredibly self-critical"*. This ties in with the notion of *janteloven*, and the fear of portraying oneself as better than one is or being perceived as arrogant. Amalie is describing how she scored herself high on arrogance, and upon the question as to why, she answers: *"I don't know, maybe it's a Norwegian thing, something like janteloven. Be careful not to, don't score yourself too high, it will be embarrassing!"*

Making these discoveries about themselves created different forms of emotional responses in all the participants. In chapter 5 I will discuss how feedback can function as a

counterweight to the negative self-talk several of the leaders experienced, and how it may change the assumptions they have of themselves.

4.2 Receiving feedback can create emotional responses

This category will explore some of the emotional responses the participants experienced. All participants have reflected upon their emotional responses to the feedback process in the interviews. Their emotional responses ranged from motivation and joy, through the need for distance, to sadness.

In her interview, Frøya experienced getting scored higher on arrogance by her management than she did herself, and upon receiving this *"it felt like a hit to the face"*. This was because there was a *"gap between how I viewed myself and how others scored me"*. She describes it further by saying that it felt a bit like an *"identity crisis"*:

> *I felt myself getting tired and confused right away. What do I do with this, where do I start? I almost felt a sense of loss because it felt a bit like an identity crisis. Because this is not who I want to be! So, there was a kind of sadness. Is this how I am?*

In questioning how she responded to this, she told me that receiving this created the need for distance, where she took "*24 hours off dedicated to self-care"*.

Jenny described experiencing feelings of sadness upon discovering that she was not as confident in her position as a leader as she thought she would be. By these feelings she describes them as being *"painful and sad"*. She states this by saying that *"I kind of thought all along that I was confident that I'm good at my job, because I think I am, but that's not what I saw in those results"*. This felt like *"a bit of a punch to the gut".* In making this discovery she got more aware of her own self-critic in saying that *"I don't experience hearing it [the self-critic] very well, but ouch, so that is how it is"*, meaning that she got aware that the self-critic was more present than she thought.

However, she still scored herself higher on what matters the most to her; being a good leader and colleague relationally, and in seeing the same results from her colleagues "*made me feel acknowledged"*. She continues by saying that she felt "grateful and moved, I even shed a tear". But then she experienced "some sort of cognitive dissonance", as her collegues scores were in stark contrast to her own. However, in her discovering her own self-critic, she also reflects upon it as being more adjusted to receiving negative feedback, since she already is strict with herself to begin with:

> *Because of this self-critic that I had discovered, none of the high scores on the reactive part hit me in a wrong way, so [...] it was more the positive feelings I got towards those who have given me feedback, because I probably recognize myself in the [negative] answers. So, for me it makes sense and then it's very manageable when it comes to the difficult feelings.*

This was also something that Sara felt. In saying that *"it was very nice to get that acknowledgement. The answers I got stated the fact that I actually am who I am trying to be, and to be acknowledged as that felt very nice"*. However, for her, this was what she calls a *"double-edged sword"*, as she did not feel that way herself. On reflecting upon this, she states that *"I have to work on feeling that way as well, and maybe that is easier when I have that acknowledgement"*.

While Sara, Frøya and Jenny mostly experienced feelings of sadness and pain while discovering their results, Emma and Amalie experienced a higher degree of more positive feelings. Emma states that she did not experience any big surprises, as *"related to the results I can tell that most of it is known to me"*. She already knew that she could be perceived as distant by her co-workers, because she tended to withdraw into her own bubble and work hard during stressful times when the workload increased.

She had originally thought that it would feel *"more painful"*, but as she enrolled in the course with the intention of developing herself, it was easier to digest the results as she *"wanted change"*, and that they were *"absolutely correct"*. She did also however experience some degree of painful feelings in discovering that *"there are some areas where it surprises me that I have a low score in, and that is relationships. I thought I would score higher, and that's perhaps the part that might feel a bit sore today"*. Emma concludes with that *"it surprises me a bit, and I think that there is information there that I was not aware of. I did not have the self-awareness that I perhaps thought I had"*. In acknowledging this her results created a spark in her, as she states:

> *I think that it is one of the areas that I must work on. It actually gives me more energy to work on it, as the fact that others experience me like that confirms the perception that I have of myself.*

For Amalie, she also says that the results *"very much confirms the thoughts I had about myself"*. This acknowledgement created more positive feelings in terms of gaining *"more self-confidence in a way [...] and that I was able to confirm that I am indeed a leader"*. She reflects further in saying that:

> *That so many have believed in me and see me as a capable leader. It was very nice. I may not have been the type to struggled with my self-image before, but it was still nice to get acknowledgement and support.*

This created the confidence she needed in moving towards her new job. However, those that received feedback which created a negative emotional response also developed the need for processing it after. In chapter 5 I will discuss how these emotions might influence the leader and how their personal characteristics may tie into the emotional response.

4.3 It is important to process your feedback

This category will highlight how processing your feedback is important for gaining perspective and insight, and for dealing with any emotional responses in a more constructive manner. As mentioned in the previous theme, after receiving her feedback, Frøya had to take a 24-hour time-out in which she practiced self-care. She then felt the need to discuss the results with someone she trusted, and resorted to her close friend and her father:

> *I spoke to a close friend, and my father [...] It was uplifting, and I started to feel that this is going to be okay. At the same time, it was much better to know that this is what it's like than not to know it, and to have the opportunity to do something about it.*

Frøya gained perspective from this, and instead of feeling like she was entering into an identity crisis, she started to feel more uplifting feelings which she describes as *"a curiosity which then led to more positive feelings like enthusiasm, commitment and optimism". Frøya started to feel like she could use this for something useful, like understanding herself better, because as she stated, "if i understand myself better I can understand others better in order to help them".* In questioning how, she answers:

> *When should I listen, when should I ask questions. When should I dig deeper, when should I lean back [...] How can I use what I have learned and how I know myself to get the best out of the situation so that the person I am working with is able to learn, develop, and achieve?*

She then proceeded to have her debrief sessions, which were *"very useful and nice"* where *"things changed significantly"*. She continues describing that her debriefer helped her process the results more objectively, by giving concrete tips and discussing the results with her:

> *She was very concerned with the fact that my results were not as bad as I thought. She said this is a creative profile, where you score high on the creative aspects. Then she said another thing that I've been thinking about [...] that I'm complex and that I shouldn't lean back as much but rather find out what gives me energy and include others by asking questions and inviting them to reflect through dialogue.*

When she compares her feeling after the initial response and after the debrief, she reports that what she had to work on got *"more concrete"* and something she could use the feelings of enthusiasm, commitment, and optimism towards. As she recounts, the debrief *"added fuel to the smoldering fire"*. Frøya concludes that *"overall, it was very positive",*

Emma also had a positive experience regarding her debrief session with her debriefer. However, she also recounts that right before her debrief session she experienced feelings of doubt and sadness, thinking *"ugh, do I really not know who I am?"*. These feelings eventually started to fade as her conversation with her debriefer progressed:

There was a sensible explanation as to why the results were as they were. After the debrief, I felt very good about the results. I thought that I have now been given some areas that I know I need to work on, which are quite familiar to me, and which I want to change. I've gotten to realize that it didn't look as bad as it did at first glance.

Emma's debriefer helped her get a clearer view of her results, what they encompassed and how she could look at them in a more constructive manner. This in turn turned the feelings of self-doubt and sadness into feelings of joy. She recounts feeling *"touched, as it was a lot of positive, nice feedback, and I thought; here we have a lot of people who think the best of me. That felt really nice!"* Emma concludes that she was feeling *"relieved and happy"* after her debrief session.

For Jenny, in anticipation of her debrief session with her debriefer, she experienced feelings of "*excitement"* and tells me that she was really *"looking forward to dig a little deeper".* In the beginning she used some time to adjust and to understand what she was going on, since she did not really know what to expect. First, she accounts for having her feelings of sadness towards her own self-critic validated by her debriefer, which "felt nice". Then her debriefer helped her *"make connections necessary to understand that those who have evaluated me doesn't see me the way I do".* This helped her understand that *"I have to consciously work on how I view myself as a leader"* and create more specific areas for improvement.

For Sara, her debrief session did not necessarily contribute to a clearer view of her results. In describing her expectations beforehand, she says that *"I think I expected and hoped that I would have received more guidance on what I should work on and perhaps how to do it".* After the session, she recounts feeling that her debriefer was *"badly prepared",* in which she describes that her debriefer did not know how many sessions they were going to have, what they already had gone through in class, and that they had already received their TLCP report. As she was expecting to get some specific *"pointers to what to work on moving forward"*, Sara was left with feeling disappointed that the session lacked direction.

In describing her session further, she says that her debriefer *"characterized me as a "good girl", which was in danger of burn-out".* On describing the cause for this warning, her debriefer said that *"she scored very high on the creative parts".* This left Sara with a feeling of irritation, as the feedback she did get from her debriefer did not match her own impression of her results. She retorts in saying that *"I also score low on perfectionism and high on balance and very rarely feel stressed"*.

These findings show that three out of five got a clearer view of their results after conducting their debrief session, where one out of five did not. In chapter 5 I will discuss what effect a debrief session can have, and how it is important for the leader receiving feedback to gain access to a holding environment.

4.4 Getting feedback may help you build confidence in your leadership abilities

This category will explore the effect feedback can have for developing confidence in your leadership abilities and in turn help you gain momentum moving forward. For Amalie, who was in between jobs at the moment, the *"timing was very good".* She is leaving a job where she feels safe, knowledgeable, and respected in the working environment. In getting her results, she describes getting surprised that *"I am actually perceived as being an effective leader".* This was important for her confidence in starting her new job. She actually *"hoped that I would get more areas to work on".*

For Emma, some of the feedback she has gotten from her colleagues, is a shared frustration around her tendency to *not* share her knowledge with them. She states that *"I know that I am known as quite capable around my colleagues, and that a frustration they have is that I don't share enough from my knowledge and experience".* This has made her reflect upon this when she is coming in to work, where she asks herself the question; *"how can I share my knowledge today?".* Asking herself this question makes her actively engaging others, where she is trying to *"make them take part in the processes I am engaging in without having them feel that I am shutting them out".*

She also states that knowing this gives her *"energy to work with it, as them [co-workers] noticing it confirms what I already know about myself".* This has altered the way she behaves at work; *"this has made me reflect upon my behaviour during the day, and how I conduct myself, how I ask questions, and, yeah, how I behave at work!".* All in all, Emma states that *"even though it is demanding, it is a positive thought to take with me coming into work".* For Emma, this process has given her motivation to continue working on herself. As the *"feedback we get from the course is so short-lived",* she has asked her debriefer to become her mentor:

> I think that the feedback we get from the course is so short-lived. Additionally, I think it's important to have someone to do this with, so I've asked my debriefer if she'd like to be my mentor, because I want to continue working on myself. I want to continue to grow, and I don't see how I'm going to manage it all by myself.

For Sara, one of her areas for improvement was *mentoring*, something which she received feedback on. Reflecting upon this, Sara says that *"the studies have required a lot of me, so I've probably forgotten that I also develop by helping others develop".* That is one thing she has taken with her because of the feedback process. On further reflection she says that *"I have a staff group that is very settled and feels secure with each other, so we have a unique opportunity to go a more in depth".*

This led Sara to start having conversations with her employees. After these conversations, she received feedback from one of them who stated her gratitude in expressing that Sara *"started a lot of processes in them".* Upon receiving this, Sara stated *"yes, now we are on to something. It is something about changing your focus. We must all develop together; it is not just about me!".*

After digesting everything, Frøya recounts feeling *"curious".* She then started *"to mobilize an urge to use it for something useful".* She, as Sara, also got feedback on her *mentoring*,

but compared to Sara her *mentoring* results were high. Nevertheless, Frøya thought *"there is more where that came from"* and put into life a bigger effort to mentor her colleagues. She recounts receiving feedback from her efforts like *"oh, this was great"* and another comment that was *"you are my biggest cheerleader".* On reflecting upon this, Frøya cites:

> I've never heard that before! It was powerful and liberating. To know that you have reached the goals you have set and to see that it is useful, and it actually works! It becomes self-reinforcing, and you go through a realization that it doesn't take that much often. It adds a quality both to the experience and afterwards!

The optimism, eagerness and curiosity Frøya felt in her developmental work is something which she now carries with her every day: *"my engagement in my potential for doing better is something which I carry with me every day, and I think it is a strength in knowing all these things".* She even recounts having to *"put it aside sometimes, because I think about it a lot".*

For Jenny, who experienced discovering that her own self-critic was more present than she thought, getting her feedback gave her a *"kick in the back".* She immediately started researching the subject, and says *"who doesn't want to feel good about themselves? And if it also makes me better at my job, then I think it goes without saying that I have to work on it".* Like Frøya, she also scored quite high on mentoring, even though she thought she *"scored lower".* Mentoring is a field in which she is invested, as she finds it *"exciting, and I have so many thoughts about it".* This could have spurred her investment in developing this dimension further, as she states that *"I should rather immerse myself in what I like best".* However, upon further reflection her feedback made her interested in focusing more on the dimension regarding *vision*, rather that *mentoring*, because how Jenny puts it; *"there is a lot of learning in immersing yourself in the things you don't like".*

For Amalie, she does not express any specifics other than that she was able to *"confirm the views I had of myself and that I am a leader".*

These findings show that four out of five got a boost of self-confidence regarding their leadership from their feedback, where one out of five did not mention specifics other than she got the confirmation she needed. In chapter 5 I will discuss how feedback is important for leader development, and how it can help the leader develop confidence from within. I will also look at how the leader can use their feedback for further development.

4.5 Feedback is valuable

This category will explore how the participants summarize their experience. They have different ways of describing it, but Jenny chooses to use a metaphor:

> It's a bit like when you get married, and all the people you love are there to give you their finest words in their best speech, and then you get it all at once. That's what it felt like […] Everyone benefits from getting feedback the way I got feedback. Too often it's more generic like "good job" but that doesn't mean anything. This, however,

meant something. That's why I compare it to a wedding speech, I kind of got everything all at once. It was nice!

On questioning as to why it was so valuable, other than getting praise, Jenny elaborates in saying that *"people have taken the time to really give constructive feedback, which made me really appreciate it. And even though it wasn't foreign to me, it was like "oh, is this what you're actually thinking".* She continues in saying that the feedback has given her *"a slightly different direction, even if it is somewhat on the same path",* and that it has made her *"appreciate my colleagues even more".* She concludes with saying that *"it has been a very good experience overall".*

Frøya describes how *"knowing your weaknesses is a strength".* She chose to use this opportunity to develop herself further, even on areas which she already got high scores. She continues in saying that she was able *"to go delve deep within myself and really think through what assumptions I had, and how those assumptions made me behave".* She elaborates further; *"we learn something new all the time, which not only makes us able to be a better version of ourselves, but also can help us in contributing to those around us".*

Getting her feedback has instilled a belief in Frøya that she can use her competence and knowledge to further develop not just herself, but also those around her:

I am concerned with the team and the organization, so I have gained a slightly greater perspective on things, how we in a way play a role in a much bigger game. That does not mean that I am at level 5, but I see that it is possible to get there.

Here she is alluding to the developmental levels in CDT, presented in chapter 2. She continues in saying that *"to help others develop may also have a ripple effect, where they in turn can help others".* This has had a powerful effect on her, in concluding that *"it's quite powerful. It has given me a feeling that if everyone makes an effort then it matters. It gives hope for the future".*

For Sara, getting her feedback has been *"nice to get confirmation that I already do a lot of things right".* At the same time, it has been *"a bit painful to get confirmation that I am very strict with myself, when there is no need to be".* However, she also highly values her feedback from others concerning her areas for improvement. It has been really *"interesting to get pointers to what I need to work on":*

It's been nice for me to get feedback from others on how I can develop. That has been the best part of this experience, one hundred percent. It hasn't been painful, it hasn't been difficult, I haven't felt any shame, haven't felt any less good. I have just felt very seen. That is a good feeling to have, because then I feel that I have grown a lot lately. It's nice to know that I one hundred percent think it's good and that I don't just pretend it is.

Sara says that she is *"happy for receiving feedback"* and concludes with saying that *"all in all, it has been a very nice experience".*

Emma portrays her experience as being *"a bit surprising".* These surprises have made her *"much more aware".* She values receiving her feedback, and the fact that *"I know what others think and how they me means that I have gained knowledge that I didn't have before".* *"Without that knowledge",* Emma says, *"I would not have had the opportunity to change".* She concludes with saying that *"all in all, I would say that is has been extremely positive. I am very grateful to have had such a tool [TLCP]".*

I have now presented five categories as my main findings from my research. This category has explored how four of the participants have valued their feedback their experience receiving it. In the coming chapter I will discuss the value of feedback, and how immersing yourself in a feedback rich environment can be valuable for further leader development. This is also where I will make connections between the theoretical groundwork presented in chapter 2 and my findings, and how they might relate to each other.

5. Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the findings from the previous chapter in light of the theoretical groundwork presented in chapter 2 and address the themes of discussion highlighted in my findings.

First, I will the explore the theme of self-criticism, something which was prevalent amongst most of my participants. I will then discuss how feedback can be used as counterweight to criticism, and some pitfalls associated with that, before I will look briefly into how personal characteristics might affect how the leader receive their feedback. After that I will discuss the emotional response experienced by the participants, before I investigate how a coach can help facilitate leader development and generating confidence from within. I will then look into the value of feedback before presenting some limitations which might come with using a 360-feedback tool such as TLCP. Finally, I will summarize the chapter with the main points made throughout the discussion.

Additionally, I have also made use of theoretical work not presented in chapter 2. This is with the intention of enriching the discussion, as themes that emerged led to seeing a need for more theory than was foreseen when writing chapter 2.

5.1 Self-criticism

Studies show that higher-level employees are more likely to have an inflated view of their performance (Sala, 2003, p. 225). The reasoning behind this could be that the leader wishes to protect their own ego, and ergo be more motivated to avoid bad self-definitions than to pursue more correct feedback on their performance. Therefore, both self-protection and self-enhancement can be expected to result in greater recall of positive than negative feedback (Ashford & Tsui, 1991, p. 254; Smither et al., 2008, p. 204). While my findings revealed that there was indeed less congruence with the perceptions of others versus how the participants viewed themselves, it was not for the reason Sala (2003) is mentioning. It was quite the opposite, as three out of five participants explicitly noted that they had scored themselves more critical than their co-workers scored them. This could be because of the cultural discrepancies between America and Norway. Another problem could be that studies also suggest that feedback recipients might be more likely to remember negative than positive feedback (Smither et al., 2008, p. 203). Even if you take the cultural aspect out of it, I imagine that if you mostly remember negative feedback, or perceived negative feedback, it most certainly will have to affect the assumptions the leader has about themselves.

As for this study, my findings show that there is an indicated fear of portraying oneself as better than one is. Additionally, as Amalie said, *"the few I have spoken to have said that they have been incredibly self-critical"*. In other words, it also relates to the other participants of the course, not only the ones I have been interviewing. This ties in with the notion of Norwegian term *janteloven*, or *do not think you are something which you are not*. This points to an inherent fear within the Norwegian society regarding how you should view yourself and your own performance, where being overtly self-confident in your own performance is frowned upon. This fear could potentially push the leader too far on the other side of the spectrum, resulting in a negatively laden self-image.

The Norwegian culture they find themselves in does not promote giving much feedback at all. This is highlighted by Jenny who tells me that *"[…] Norwegians, we don't say things like that to each other",* something which could be interpreted as it is uncommon in our culture to give each other feedback, which includes positive feedback. This viewpoint is also shared by Emma, who says that *"I think that most people need feedback, but that we are generally too bad at giving it."* There is in other words an indicated desire for feedback being more common than it is in our culture. This could be one of the reasons for the leaders to be having an overly self-critical view of themselves. If the leader is at level 3, basing their view of themselves on how others view them, the cultural context does not provide what they need to build a positive self-image in terms of affirmations from others. If you rarely receive this from others, the level 3 leader might assume that it is because they aren't good enough.

Feedback from other sources than themselves may therefore be appropriate, as feedback to obtain a more accurate picture of one's strengths and weaknesses should enable the leader to better understand their impact on each other (Axelrod, 2012, 348). However, a problem that might occur is that Norwegians can be more inclined to be nice than honest when offering feedback, because we are so shy of confrontation (Tveita, 2022). On the other hand, since the cultural context does not promote feedback at all, the participants might not get what they need to build a positive self-image of their leadership performance. Feedback could therefore be valuable despite of it just being nice, as nice is what could be needed to help the leader develop a more positive self-image better suited for receiving constructive feedback later.

In addition, Sara mentions that *"sometimes you score yourself high on what you are afraid to be perceived as"*, regarding scoring herself higher on the reactive part than the creative part. As studies show that negative feedback had a stronger effect on students' perceptions of their own performance than positive feedback, self-ratings and perceptions of your own leadership may not be the most accurate method of assessing performance (Smither et al., 2008, p. 203; Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988, p. 43). This can be seen as an argument as to why developing a feedback rich culture in the workplace is important for the leader ability to assess their performance and adjust their development goals accordingly.

In this section I have argued how the leaders interviewed tend to have a high degree of self-criticism, and that the culture they find themselves in could negatively impact the assumptions they harbour. A way to tackle this could be to promote a culture where feedback is more prominent. In the next section I will investigate how feedback can be used as a counterweight to the leader's self-criticism.

5.2 Feedback as a counterweight to self-criticism

In my findings I have shown that the leaders tend to judge their performance quite critically. I have also argued that getting feedback from other sources could be beneficial. Getting feedback from direct reports might be viewed as especially valuable because feedback recipients are likely to receive less feedback from their direct reports than from their supervisor (Smither et al., 2008, p. 215). The reason behind this could be that the direct reports are afraid of how the leader might react to their feedback. Feedback from

direct reports might therefore be distorted. For example, a direct report might avoid providing negative feedback to avoid the risk of retaliation and therefore might provide insincere positive feedback as an approval tactic (Smither et al., 2008, p. 215). If the leader only receives positive feedback, it might inflate their view of themselves, as Sala (2003) concluded with (p. 225).

One alternative to counter this could be to provide only negative feedback and to save positive feedback for a separate occasion, but this creates the risk will be perceived as unbalanced and unfair, thereby leading the leader to reject the feedback (Smither et al., 2008, p. 217). That is something which should be avoided, as reactions to feedback represent an important element of 360-feedback success (Atwater & Waldman, 1998, p. 424). Even though none of my participants showed explicit signs of self-deceptive responses, Baumeister and Cairns (1992) found that repressors, or people who are likely to display defensive or self-deceptive responses, sometimes devoted less processing time to unfavorable personality feedback and later recalled positive feedback better than negative (as cited in Smither et al., 2008, p. 203). Offering more balanced feedback raises the possibility that recipients will be more likely to recall favorable aspects of the feedback rather than the central point of the feedback, for example areas that need improvement (Smither et al., 2008, p. 217). On the other hand, Baumeister et. al. (2001) later concluded that negative feedback is processed more thoroughly than positive, and that one is more motivated to avoid negative self-definitions than to pursue positive ones (p. 323). This could be one reason for the leaders in this study being so overly critical, that they have tried avoiding negative self-definitions instead of fully absorbing the positive aspects of their leadership.

My findings therefore indicated a need for affirmation in the leaders interviewed. As they have judged themselves so harshly, they needed a counterweight to balance out their own negative self-perception. This was vocalized in different ways by several of the leaders, that receiving positive feedback felt *"nice",* and that it was acknowledging, motivational and confidence-boosting. As my participants have shown signs of being overly critical towards themselves, withholding positive feedback would not be a strategic approach if the goal is positive behavior change such as improvements in leader behavior. As my findings show, the positive feedback influenced the confidence the participants had in their leadership abilities and made them more likely to work on areas of improvement. I would therefore argue that a more nuanced feedback approach is more valuable in terms of leader development. Smither et al. (2005) also found that leaders who received favorable feedback were more likely than other leaders to see the feedback as valuable (p. 196). For the leaders in this study, receiving positive feedback resulted in altered behaviours and direct actions being made to work on areas of improvement, for example researching their shortcomings and having developmental conversations with their direct reports.

In this section I have argued how feedback can be used as a counterweight to self-criticism, and some pitfalls one might look out for. How effective feedback can be also relies on personal characteristics, perhaps because behavior is a function of personality, or what people do is a function of who they are (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 423). In the next section I will investigate how this might be the case.

5.3 Personal characteristics

The effects of feedback depend on, among others, the personality of the feedback recipient (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 856). The "Big Five," or the five-factor model of personality, is a well-established and frequently used measure of normal personality (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 423). A common conceptualization of the Big Five includes the five personality dimensions Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 423). In relation to this, Smither et al. (2005) did a longitudinal study where they researched the relationship between leaders' personality and their reactions to receiving feedback. As Seifert & Yukl, they also found that personality plays a role in leaders' reactions to and use of 360-feedback (p. 206).

In interviewing my participants, seeing as it was the first time meeting them and having an in-depth conversation, I could get a feel of how I perceived them as a person. My interview with Amalie resulted in my longest interview, both measured in time and word-count in the transcriptions. This could indicate personality traits corresponding with Extraversion and Openness to Experience, in context of the Big Five (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 423). In receiving her feedback, Amalie expresses that *"very much confirms the thoughts I had about myself".* She elaborates in saying that *"I may not have been the type to struggled with my self-image before, but it was still nice to get acknowledgement and support".* According to Seifert & Yukl (2010), people react in different ways to negative feedback, but it is more likely to be accepted and applied by someone with strong self-confidence and emotional maturity (p. 857). Even though she did not get any overly critical feedback, she actually *"hoped that I would get more areas to work on"*, which could be a sentiment to her strong self-image.

This is also supported by the study of Smither et al., who found that leaders that are open to experience and extraverted are more likely to view negative feedback as valuable and seek additional feedback after receiving such feedback (Smither et. al, 2005, p. 203). Sara mentions that it was the constructive feedback on areas to improve that excited her the most. While she also has been hard on herself, she describes herself as *"feeling quite secure"* in her role as a leader. She describes further in saying that *"the nicest thing was getting feedback on what I can improve, because when I read through the comments, I thought, oh, wow, they really know me!"*

Studies indicate that leaders who are open to new experiences are likely to welcome feedback (Smither et al., 2005, p. 202). Emma concludes with not having "*the self-awareness that I perhaps thought I had",* but that being on the receiving end of feedback indicating areas of improvement gave her more energy to work on it. Emma continues in saying that *"I have been given some areas that I know I need to work on, which are quite familiar to me, and which I want to change"* and concludes with saying *"that is why I am here."* Just by enrolling in this leader development course, could be an indication that the participants are open to new experience, and therefore had positive experiences related to receiving their feedback. On the other hand, it might not be based upon an informed choice, and the participants might not know what they are getting into.

In this section I have argued that personality type might affect how the leader handle their feedback. In the next section I will investigate the emotional responses experienced in receiving it, and how these emotions might influence the leader.

5.4 Dealing with the emotional responses

Receiving feedback often represents an affective event for employees (Motro & Ellis, 2017, p. 227). In a study by Smither et al. (2008), the recipients of feedback described three types of emotions: positive, negative, and motivational. This also corresponds to my findings, and especially exemplified through Frøya, who experienced all of them. She initially felt negative emotions and a sense of loss in discovering a gap between how she viewed herself and how others viewed her, which she describes almost as an identity crisis. She then experienced positive emotions after taking a 24-hour time-out, and feelings that it was going to be okay, and that it was better to know than not to know. Finally, she experienced emotions of motivation, where she recounts feeling *"curious",* and started *"to mobilize an urge to use it for something useful".*

Kegan (1982) used two internal structures to define each constructive-developmental stage: these structures are called subject and object (as cited in Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 422). Kegan holds that moving an element from subject to object, meaning objectifying something to which one was previously subject, fuels cognitive development. The subject is the process through which individuals organize and understand their experience; it is the lens through which the world is viewed and the rule by which it is defined (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 422). In this you could say that Frøya made something which was initially *subject*, in her emotional sense of loss and identity crisis as a response to her feedback, and transformed it to something object, which she could use as what she referred to as *"fuel to the smoldering fire".* This transformation meant gaining the ability to take observe the way that they previously organized their experience, rather than being defined by it (Strang & Kuhnert, 2009, p. 422).

The more of her affective responses Frøya could reflect upon as object, the more she could appreciate and understand her situation, and the more complex her overall outlook became (Girgis et al., 2018, p. 3). By being able to zoom out and experience a more objective self-awareness, she won't get entangled in her emotional responses to the feedback she received. This is what Jordan (2001) calls the witnessing self (p. 1-2). The ability to do this, however, is defined by the developmental capacity for meaning making. If the developmental level is not equipped to handle these emotional responses in a more objective manner the leader might need help processing their feedback through the aid of a coach or a debriefer. This is supported by Seifert & Yukl (2010), who claims that behavior change is more likely to occur when a neutral facilitator helps leaders interpret the feedback (p. 857).

However, my selection of participants also lack diversity, especially with regards to gender, as they all are female. Motro & Ellis (2017) argues that there are discrepancies between gender regarding how they receive negative feedback based on societal expectations and role congruity, where women are expected to have strong emotional response while men are not (p. 228). Seeing as all my participants are women, emotional responses are, according to Motro and Ellis (2019), to be expected and even encouraged (p. 227). Based off this, gender might also influence how they receive their feedback.

In this section I have argued that making object of what was once subject is helpful in terms of dealing with the affective repercussions of receiving feedback. I have also argued that gender might influence how the leader receive their feedback. In addition, it might be

helpful to get support from a coach or a debriefer during the feedback process. In the next section I will investigate how this might be the case.

5.5 Processing your feedback

In my findings my participants have elaborated on how they have had a need to digest and process their results, and that the debrief helped them do so. Donald Winnicott originated the term holding environment, describing an environment where the individual is held in his or her feelings. He used the metaphor of the relationship between a mother and an infant, where the motherly care was demonstrated in her capacity to hold her infant in their needs (Winnicott, 1963, as cited in Slochower, 1991, p. 709). In terms of processing your feedback, this holding environment can be described as the debrief process where the debriefer helped the participants interpret and understand their feedback.

Before her debrief, Frøya needed to create the holding environment on her own. She practiced self-care for 24 hours just to digest the information she got from her feedback, which could emphasize the need for it. She then contacted a close friend and her father who were able to nurture her needs in terms of creating a holding environment. Through holding her, they helped her feel safe, which in turn made her realize that *"it's going to be okay."* In Emma's experience, she recounts having feelings of doubt and sadness before her session, thinking *"ugh, do I really not know who I am?"*. These feelings eventually started to fade as her conversation with her debriefer progressed, as the debriefer helped her get a clearer view of her results, what they encompassed and how she could look at them in a more constructive manner. Her debriefer also was quite adamant about going through all the written feedback she had gotten from her colleagues, and highlighted specific comments that were positive. This shows that a debriefer can help remind the leader about the positive consequences from affirmative responses to the feedback (Smither et al., 2005, p. 203). As a result, Emma's initial feelings of dread going into the debrief session were exchanged for feelings of elation and happiness.

In developing leaders, one of the core mechanisms behind it involves the tension between challenge and support, where challenge comes from encountering environmental contexts in which the complexity of the task demand is beyond that of current meaning making (Reams, 2014, p. 138). In this instance, receiving feedback is that context, and a coach could help process and make the information from the feedback available to the leader. Emma recognized this and asked her debriefer to become her mentor. In stating that *"I want to continue to grow, and I don't see how I'm going to manage it all by myself",* Emma is alluding to the fact that to fully facilitate the knowledge gained through feedback in terms of development, she needs aid. This aid can come from a coach. In terms of challenge and support, the latter comes in the form of a holding environment that provides safety and security for taking risks and experimenting with different forms of meaning making and subsequent action (Reams, 2014, p. 138). In other words, it may be important for the leader receiving feedback to gain access to a holding environment, as we have seen in the previous section. Supporting this need in the feedback process may initially fall under the responsibility of a coach.

In this section I have argued that getting help from a neutral third party such as a coach or a debriefer can be fruitful for the leader's processing of their results and in creating a

holding environment. In the next section I will investigate how feedback can be used for development to take place.

5.6 Feedback as a means for leader development

Kegan & Lahey (2009) outline three points which are important in the step towards development and change (p. 254). Point 1) change does not happen overnight, expect to devote time to the process; point 2) choose a form of support; and point 3) consider the variety of tasks and activities which might help you develop (p. 254).

As to point 1), Fusco et al. (2015) have revealed that leaders became conscious, competent, confident, and congruent over the course of the coaching process (as cited in Erdös et al., 2022, p. 368). This is something which Jenny was aware of, in citing that *"I think this [getting feedback] has contributed to a lot of growth in the long term, but I need to be generous with myself and give myself time"*. Emma also confirms this, in saying that *"to change your behaviour is not done overnight […] it might take your whole life!"*. Development therefore takes time. As to point 2), choosing some form of support is something which Emma explicitly understands, in her choosing to ask her debriefer to become her mentor. Several of the participants also experienced negative emotions following their feedback results, something which created the need for a holding environment. As to point 3), little actual improvement is likely unless they remain focused on implementing their plans for using the feedback as a source for development (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). Several of my participants have noted taking steps towards change, however none have, at the time of interviewing, stated explicit and specific goals to work towards. The reason for this could be that they have not had enough time to process yet, as recipients may need some time to reflect and absorb the feedback without the attendant emotions of disappointment (Smither et. al, 2005, p. 203). Nevertheless, making specific goals relevant to their feedback is something which could benefit the participants in their leader development. Additionally, it is important that the feedback is clear and concise.

Smither et al. (2008) found that feedback recipients were more likely to recall feedback about specific behaviors than broad, trait-oriented impressions (p. 216). This highlights the importance of clear and concise feedback, something which Jenny describes in saying how grateful she was for the elaborate feedback she got. Seifert & Yukl (2010) also argues that the feedback is likely to be ignored or discounted when it is difficult to understand or appears to be inaccurate (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 856). A testament to this is Sara who felt irritated when her debriefer characterized her as something which did not match her own impression of her results, and how she managed her work-life. This could highlight the importance not just of accurate feedback, but also the importance of accurate assessments in their debriefing and interpretation of the feedback results.

After the initial feedback, it may be important to follow up on the session. One reason being that a single feedback cycle may be perceived as a gimmick, while repeated feedback requires a greater investment of time and resources and may enhance the perceived importance of the behaviors for which feedback is being provided (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). While feedback indicates room for improvement, a second round may influence the leader to make a stronger effort. If the following feedback round indicates that some improvement has occurred, it may spur efforts to improve even further (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). Several feedback rounds could also provide the recipient with a holding

environment in their development. Additionally, a second round of feedback may make leaders feel more accountable for improving their performance, as they must follow up on their efforts. The opportunity to get feedback on more than one occasion therefore has several potential benefits, as such self-aware feedback loops can drive the leader's personal growth (Yarborough, 2018, p. 52).

Even so, Orvis & Ratwani (2010) claimed that organizations cannot expect their leaders to engage in self-development if there is no organizational effort to support the growth that feedback can give (p. 667). They further concluded that organizations that make it a priority to formally provide guidance and feedback concerning their leaders' self-development may also serve to enhance leaders' motivation to engage in future self-development (Orvis & Ratwani, 2010, p. 670). One way of making development a priority is through leadership coaching.

In providing both challenge and support, a coach can help leaders develop and grow into more mature leaders who are more defined being inside-out rather than outside-in, meaning that at level 4, new questions emerge. The leader begins to differentiate from the culturally accepted messages and begins to define themselves from within, rather than outside in. In other words, the leader is, therefore, living and leading much more autonomously or independently (Anderson, 2006, p. 178). As my findings suggest, some factors like being overly self-critical and in need of positive reinforcement on their performance can be indicative of a level 3 development stage, as you tend to define yourself more by outside influences (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2016, p. 109). This might further indicate the need for developmental aid through a developmental coach.

This is also confirmed by my findings, where two of the participants explicitly talks about their perception of their own developmental level. Emma states that after reading her course literature, she has concluded that she is *"typical level 3"*. In further reflections, she says that *"my motivation by doing this is getting past level 3, and maturing into level 4, where I can stand firm in my own processes instead of being concerned with the acceptance of others."* Emma continues: *"when I read about those who are operating on a level 4 or 5 stage of development, and how calm and safe they are within themselves, I must admit that I long to eventually get there myself."* Frøya also mentions this in her interview in saying that *"this [360-feedback] have given me a greater perspective"* and that *"not that I am level 5, I am not even level 4, but I see now that it is possible to get there."* Developing through the stages is important, as key leadership competencies are primarily level 4 behaviors (Anderson, 2006, p. 178). In other words, they are most readily accessed when the self is fully configured at level 4. Based on this, leadership coaching can therefore help bring leaders closer to their developmental goals (Lawrence, 2016, p. 122).

However, reaching level 4 and beyond does not mean that the need for coaching disappears. Berger & Fitzgerald (2002) identify two primary objectives of coaching. First, to support an executive in discovering taken-for-granted assumptions, or making what is subject available for reflection and conscious control to make them object (as cited in McCauley et al., 2006, p. 642). Reaching level 4 does not mean that the leader is free of assumptions or being subject to his or her emotional state. Following this, the second primary objective of the coach is to help the leader understand and address the different demands that each order of development presents (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 642). This

means that even if the leader reaches higher stages of development, there will still be need for help in understanding and addressing the demands of that current stage. While level 3 leaders might need help concerning their inter-personal relationships, level 4 leaders might have needs concerning competence and performance (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 638).

In this section I have argued how feedback can be used as a means for leader development. In the next section I will investigate why feedback is valuable and necessary for this development to take place.

5.7 Value of feedback

Feedback is proven to be one of the most relevant factors in the development of new leaders (Steele et al., 2018, p. 28). Just as beauty is said to be in the eye of the beholder, some aspects of a leader's effectiveness can only be judged by others (Smither et al., 2008, p. 204). I would therefore argue that reflection on one's own role as a leader, without some form of feedback, is ineffective in relation to facilitating learning (Steele et al., 2018, p. 28). Some aspects of a leader's performance cannot be accurately evaluated without feedback from others. The reason being that while leaders might be able to accurately evaluate the extent to how they initiate structure for their employees, it can be difficult to assess behaviours pertaining to more considerable traits, such as being seen as supportive or warm. How can managers know whether they are perceived as supportive, warm, or sensitive to others' feelings? If the leader does not receive feedback, it may deprive them of the opportunity for external input that the leader can use to examine their own practice (Smither et al., 2008, p. 204).

However, unless self-development is viewed as highly important, the need to deal with urgent leadership responsibilities may leave little time for leaders to monitor their own behavior carefully and try to change it. Feedback is more likely to impact the recipient's subsequent behavior when an organization has a strong climate of support for leadership development (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). However, in most studies on the effects of behavioral feedback to managers, the feedback was provided only once (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). Over time, if you have only gotten feedback once, you might forget important factors in relation to your feedback. It is difficult to imagine how feedback can shape self-perceptions or contribute to behavior change unless feedback recipients recall the feedback (Smither et. al., 2008, p. 217). The opportunity to get feedback on more than one occasion therefore has several potential benefits, as a second round of feedback is likely to make managers feel more accountable for improving their performance. The reason being that if the feedback indicates room for improvement, a second round may influence the leader to make a stronger effort. If the feedback indicates that some improvement has occurred, it may spur further efforts to improve (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857).

What's more, the most obvious goal of 360-feedback is to increase an individual self-awareness so that improvements can be made (Atwater & Waldman, 1998, p. 423). The feedback may, however, take a while to sink in. Smither et. al (2005) found that leaders who received unfavorable feedback initially had negative reactions but 6 months later had set more improvement goals than other leaders (p. 203). In her interview, Emma explicitly says that *"I wish I could take the same test [TLCP] again in six months"*. On following up

on as to why, she replies that *"I think that just by being made aware of how one is perceived, and that I myself am made aware of how I experience myself, it can contribute to quite big changes."* Emma continues in saying that *"for me this has been really positive to be made aware of these things, because I haven't been able to connect the dots and realize that this is how I am perceived".* Immersing yourself in a feedback rich environment can therefore be valuable for further leader development. Yet, giving feedback requires psychological safety (Tucker, & Williams, 2021, p. 1634). Using a 360-feedback tool like TLCP can meet that need by giving feedback in a less revealing way, especially for subordinates, before establishing a more feedback rich culture in the workplace.

In this section I have investigated how you can gain value from feedback. In the next section, I will look at some limitations which might follow a method like TLCP.

5.8 Limitations

In a study, Harris & Kuhnert (2008) found that stage development level predicted leadership effectiveness using the 360-degree feedback tool across several sources including superiors, subordinates, and peers (p. 47). However, there is a fairly short history of rigorous scholarly theory and research on the topics of leader and leadership development (Day et. al., 2014, p. 64). The criterion commonly used to assess the impact of feedback is improvement in the leadership behavior or skills for which feedback is provided (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). In their studies, McCauley et al. (2006), found mixed support for claims that a leader's stage of cognitive development impacts their leadership effectiveness (p. 634). There is therefore, as of yet, a general lack of evidence linking developmental level to leadership effectiveness from a lack of compelling evidence (Lawrence, 2016, p. 127-128).

Also, merely assuming that giving a leader feedback will result in a behavioral change, and ultimately organizational performance improvement, is overly simplistic (Day et. al., 2014, p. 71). A higher leverage approach is to help the manager get some self-awareness around the assumptions around their own practice, and the automatic responses that they are making to situations that lead them to be for example hyper-critical. If they can begin to interrupt these responses, they can begin to get more flexibility in their behavior (Anderson, 2006, p. 179). However, initiatives taken to improve this may be effective only in organizations with implemented developmental strategies, as little actual improvement is likely unless they remain focused on implementing their plans for using the feedback as a source for development (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). In other words, if you don't have the structural support of the organization to facilitate full use of the 360-feedback results, the leader might end up with a lot of information which he or she might not be able to process in a constructive manner.

Lawrence & Bachkirova (2023) also highlights another limitation of the 360-feedback method, being that the variations of the rater responses are subject to whether they find ratees pleasant to work with and the age, gender, and status of the person they are rating (p. 18). In other words, there can be issues with the objectivity of the ratings, regardless of how many you have been rated by. Also, in their recent paper Lawrence & Bachkirova (2023) argues that the value of feedback for change would require first self-understanding and self-acceptance rather than a prompt for change (p. 26). It can be a conundrum that to make fully use of feedback, you must have a high degree of self-awareness and

understanding, something which is one of the goals of receiving the feedback to begin with. This might strengthen the argument that it is beneficial for the leader to get help from a coach in accessing the full potential of the feedback given.

In this section I have investigated some limitations linked to the use of a 360-feedback as a developmental tool for leaders. In the next section I will summarize the main points made in this chapter.

5.9 Summary

Feedback is proven to be one of the most relevant factors in the development of leaders, but merely assuming that giving feedback equals behavioural change is overly simplistic. There are several factors which influences how developmental feedback can be.

My findings show that the leaders interviewed tend to have a high degree of self-criticism. There could be several reasons for this, among others cultural aspects, developmental level and that they may have tried avoiding negative self-definitions. *Based off this, my findings also indicated a need for affirmation in the leaders interviewed.* For the participants, getting feedback from other sources therefore functioned as a counterweight to their negative self-perception and helped them get a more accurate image of themselves. In interviewing, phrases like acknowledging, motivational and confidence-boosting were uttered by the participants. However, some participants who showed signs of a strong self-image, gained most value from receiving feedback on areas of improvement.

Either way, the participants put into words how receiving feedback created emotional responses in them. Based on the leader's developmental level, it might be fruitful for the leader getting help processing their feedback. One way of doing this is through leadership coaching. A neutral facilitator such as a coach may also be able to hold the leader in their feelings, as well as managing the balance between challenge and support, something which is one of the core mechanisms of development. This could help the leader develop through the stages. This is important, as key leadership competencies are primarily level 4 behaviors. My findings also show that reaching this stage of development is something which is a goal for the participants. If the leader is not already fully developed at this stage, he or she might need help getting there by making object of what was once subject and creating a more objective self-awareness.

I have now made argued how feedback might be a vehicle for development, from the initial reaction to processing to making steps towards change. In next and final chapter, I will present my contribution to knowledge, as well as some limitations and recommendations for further research, in addition to some concluding comments.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to gain insight into the experience of receiving feedback, and how this feedback can be used for leader development. The research has been based on the following problem statement:

How can feedback function as a part of leader development? An exploration of the phenomenological experience of getting feedback and how to make use of it.

In investigating this I have made use of the following research questions:

1. *What assumptions might leaders have of themselves, and can feedback change their assumptions in any way?*

2. *Can feedback be valuable as a developmental tool for leaders?*

In this chapter I will conclude my thesis by answering these questions and highlight the contribution to knowledge made through my research. I will then present some personal comments and reflections before presenting some limitations and recommendations for further research. Lastly, I will give some concluding comments.

6.1 Contribution to knowledge

The problem statement has been researched through a qualitative study following the IPA-method, with the goal of investigating how leaders experienced their 360-feedback assessment using TCLP. I have gained access to these experiences by interviewing five participants with leadership responsibilities, before transcribing, coding, and analysing the interview data. This led me to five main findings presented in chapter 4, more specifically; *leaders may experience a high degree of self-criticism*, *receiving feedback can create emotional responses*, *it is important to process your feedback, getting feedback may help you build confidence in your leadership abilities* and *feedback is valuable.* In chapter 5 I zoomed out with the intention of situating these isolated experiences into a larger context. This perspective, in addition to the experiences made by the participants, has provided me with new insight regarding feedback as a means for leader development. To highlight this insight, I will make use of my research questions.

My first research question was *what assumptions might leaders have of themselves, and can feedback change their assumptions in any way?* My findings have shown that the leaders interviewed have experienced a high degree of self-criticism. This has revealed itself through their feedback results, and how their own results differ from what those around them rate them. Comments like *"maybe I didn't dare to think of myself as the effective leader I actually am"* and having *"a fear of scoring myself too high"* were recorded during the interviews. While other studies have shown that higher-level employees are found to be more likely to have an inflated view of their performance, this was not the cause in my research. There could be several reasons for this; cultural discrepancies, *janteloven*, developmental level, avoiding negative self-definitions or how one processes feedback. *My findings therefore indicated a need for affirmation in the leaders interviewed. As they have judged themselves so harshly, they needed a counterweight to balance out their own negative self-perception.* Getting positive feedback influenced the confidence

the participants had in their leadership abilities and made them more likely to work on areas of improvement. Self-ratings may therefore not be the most accurate method of assessing performance. This is part of the reason why feedback from others is valuable for development, which leads us into the next research question:

How can feedback be valuable as a developmental tool for leaders? My findings suggest that feedback can indeed be valuable, as all my participants have put into words how the process have been valuable to them. However, they have also all processed their feedback through getting debriefed by a debriefer with specific knowledge about the tool used to receive it. Beforehand, some of them described sitting with their feedback in uncomfortable ways. Feedback is therefore not inherently positive, as we are limited by our own perspectives (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 223). Feedback can be valuable because getting feedback can help the leader expand those perspectives. This is exemplified through one of the participants, in saying that *"I have gained knowledge that I didn't have before"* and *"without that knowledge, I would not have had the opportunity to change".*

Furthermore, the leader's stage of development influences what they notice or can become aware of, and therefore, what they can describe, reflect on, and therefore change (Cook-Greuter, 2004, as cited in McCauley et al., 2006, p. 636). In this way, feedback can function as a mirror for the leader, where he or she can observe their own behavior in a more objective manner (Dembkowski et. al., 2006, p. 56). Relating this to stage-theory can also help make sense of how the leader interprets their feedback. The capacity for subject-object change might help the individual to deal with the affective repercussions of receiving constructive or unwanted feedback. This capacity is something which is prevalent in level 4 behaviour and beyond.

If you are below level 4, however, you might need help processing your feedback through either a coach or someone qualified to be able to make it available to your level of meaning making. One way of doing this might be through having an adequate debriefing process to support the meaning making process and in turn enabling development. By getting help zooming out and experiencing a more objective self-awareness, the leader won't get entangled in their emotional responses to the feedback received. However, reaching level 4 and beyond does not mean that the need for coaching disappears. Even if the leader reaches higher stages of development, there will still be need for help in understanding and addressing the demands of that current stage. In addition, I have also argued that the effects of feedback may depend on, among others, the personality of the feedback recipient.

In conclusion, I will circle back to the problem statement: *how can feedback function as a part of leader development?* My research has shown that for the participants of this research project, receiving feedback has helped them gain a more nuanced image of themselves as a leader. This has resulted in a motivational confidence-boost, which has led several of them to make actions toward change. Some of them even relished feedback based upon their areas of improvement. However, while insights can be powerful, they do not necessarily lead to transformation (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 253).

I have therefore argued that other contributing factors for facilitating leader development are making specific goals relevant to the feedback, creating a support system, and acknowledging that development does not happen overnight. Based off this, I have argued that it is important that the organization supports the development of their leaders, as it

can enhance the leaders' motivation to engage in future self-development. One way of doing this is using a 360-feedback tool like TLCP. However, there are some limitations linked to the use of this tool. One of them being issues with the objectivity of the raters, while another limitation might be lack of developmental support within the organization and that the value of feedback for change would require a high degree of self-understanding to begin with. As an integral part of leader development involves drawing meaning to the learning experiences of the leader and how one makes sense of these experiences, it becomes valuable once the leader can make meaning out of it and transform it to something which he or she can use for further development (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004). Feedback on its own is just that, feedback. In other words, feedback can be valuable once you make meaning out of it. I have based on this argued that leadership coaching is something that can help the leader achieve this.

I have now concluded my research. In the next section I will present some limitations and recommendations for further research.

6.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research

This study has several limitations. First, with its small sample, it is not representative of a larger population. While some of the findings may be transferable to other cases and contexts, the findings are not statistically generalizable. In the end, these are just five subjective experiences made from receiving feedback. Though you might see patterns, the experience made will likely be as different as the individual receiving it. That is one of the reasons that I wished to put these experiences into a bigger picture and investigate how these experiences can be transferred into something usable as a means for development. My selection of participants also lack diversity, especially with regards to gender, as they all are female. It would have been interesting to see if gender would have made any difference in the way the participants experienced their feedback.

As previously noted, there is a fairly short history of research on the topics of leader and leadership development (Day et. al., 2014, p. 64). In most studies on the effects of behavioral feedback to managers, the feedback was provided only once, even though a second round of feedback is likely to make managers feel more accountable for improving their performance (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). One of the participants also stated explicitly that she would like to revisit the TLCP assessment in six months. A few studies have included more than one feedback cycle but were not designed to assess the effects of repeated feedback (Seifert & Yukl, 2010, p. 857). For further research, it would therefore have been interesting to conduct new interviews with the participants over time, to see if they have been able to transform their feedback into long-term change. Recommendations for further research therefore includes assessing the effects of repeated feedback in terms of leader development.

6.3 Concluding comments

It is difficult to pinpoint what I have gained through this process, as it is a lot. To quote one of the participants: *"I wish I could take the same test again in six months"*. I think six months is too early to embark on another thesis, but I do want to reflect upon what this process have yielded for me personally once the dust has settled. In any case, I am thankful for the opportunity to take a deep dive and explore a field of which I am personally interested. For now, onwards!

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Appendix A – Interesseskjema intervju

Feedback as a means for leader development

Tord Carlsen

Dette er et forskningsprosjekt i forbindelse med master i rådgivningsvitenskap ved NTNU. Formålet med dette prosjektet er å undersøke hvordan feedback kan brukes som verktøy for utvikling, og om feedback endrer lederens evne til meningsskaping rundt egen praksis. Forskningsprosjektet tar utgangspunkt i følgende problemstilling:

How can feedback function as a part of leader development? An exploration of the phenomenological experience of getting feedback and how to make use of it.

I denne oppgaven ønsker jeg dermed å utforske feltet innenfor voksnes utvikling og se nærmere på hvordan tilbakemeldingene dere får kan brukes som et verktøy for videre utvikling i deres lederskap. For å undersøke dette vil jeg benytte meg av en kvalitativ metodisk tilnærming, og mer spesifikt det kvalitative intervjuet. Basert på problemstillingen min vil jeg derfor spørre om din opplevelse av det å få feedback som del av dette kurset. Eksempel på spørsmål som vil bli stilt er:

Kan du beskrive din opplevelse av det å få feedback?
- Hvilke tanker fikk du da du fikk disse tilbakemeldingene?
- Kan du beskrive noen følelser som dukket opp i deg da du fikk disse tilbakemeldingene?

Intervjuet regnes til å ta cirka en time. Aller helst ønsker jeg å gjennomføre dette ansikt til ansikt, men det kan også gjennomføres digitalt om det er ønske om det. Etiske hensyn i form av anonymisering, sikker lagring og sletting av materiale etter endt prosjekt vil bli ivaretatt. Ved gjennomføring av intervju vil det også skrives under et samtykkeskjema med informasjon om prosjektet.

Dette vil være til stor hjelp for meg for å kunne lære mer om prosessen om det å få feedback og hvordan dette kan brukes som verktøy for videre utvikling. I tillegg vil det forhåpentligvis også være en mulighet for dere til å bearbeide de erfaringene dere får med en nøytral tredjepart som kan stille spørsmål som inspirerer til refleksjon rundt deres opplevelse, slik at læringsutbytte forhåpentligvis blir enda større.

Hvis dette er av interesse for deg, vennligst skriv e-mail adressen din ved siden av navnet ditt under intervju-seksjonen i skjemaet under, så vil jeg ta kontakt for å avtale videre.

Tusen takk,
Tord Carlsen

First name	Last name	Agree to observation	Interview (e-mail)

Appendix B – Interview guide

Feedback as a means for leader development

Check-in
Hvordan har du det? Hvordan er det for deg å være her nå? Hva kjenner du på?

Innledning
Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv, din rolle som leder og arbeidet ditt?

Spørsmål 1
Hvordan så du på deg selv om leder før du var med på denne
tilbakemeldingsprosessen?
    a. Hvilke tanker hadde du rundt egen praksis?
    b. Hva følte du om deg selv som leder?

Spørsmål 2
Kan du beskrive din opplevelse av det å få tilbake resultatene fra din TLCP?
    a. Hvilke tanker og følelser fikk du da du så resultatene?
    b. Hva gjorde disse tankene og følelsene med deg?
    c. Påvirket de mottageligheten for tilbakemeldingene du fikk?

Spørsmål 3
Kan du beskrive opplevelsen av debriefingsprosessen i forbindelse med disse
tilbakemeldingene?
    a. Hvilke tanker fikk du?
    b. Hvilke følelser fikk du?

Spørsmål 4
Hvordan ser du på deg selv som leder nå?
    a. Har det endret på bildet du hadde av deg selv?
    b. Hvilke tanker og følelser har du hatt i forbindelse med dette?
    c. Hva gjorde disse tankene og følelsene med deg?

Spørsmål 5
Hvilke erfaringer sitter du igjen med etter at du har vært gjennom denne
tilbakemeldingsprosessen?
    a. Har det startet noen prosesser inni deg?
    b. Hvordan oppleves disse prosessene?

Spørsmål 6
Hva har disse prosessene gjort med deg i forhold til ditt fremtidige lederskap?
    a. Hva kunne du tenkt deg å endre på?
    b. Hvordan kjennes det ut?

Debrief
Kan du gi en oppsummering? Har du noe du vil legge til? Føles det greit å
avslutte nå?

Appendix C - Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjekt

Feedback as a means for leader development

Formål

Dette er et forskningsprosjekt i forbindelse med master i rådgivningsvitenskap ved NTNU. Formålet med dette prosjektet er å undersøke hvordan feedback kan brukes som verktøy for utvikling, og om feedback endrer lederens evne til meningsskaping rundt egen praksis. Forskningsprosjektet tar utgangspunkt i følgende problemstilling:

How can feedback function as a part of leader development? An exploration of the phenomenological experience of getting feedback and how to make use of it.

I denne oppgaven ønsker jeg dermed å utforske feltet innenfor voksnes utvikling og se nærmere på hvordan tilbakemeldingene dere får kan brukes som et verktøy for videre utvikling i deres lederskap. For å undersøke dette vil jeg benytte meg av en kvalitativ metodisk tilnærming, og mer spesifikt det kvalitative intervjuet. Basert på problemstillingen min vil jeg derfor spørre om din opplevelse av det å få feedback som del av dette kurset.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien

Deltakelse i studien innebærer studentens overværelse i klassen gjennom kursforløpet, samt et dybdeintervju med varighet på ca. 60 minutter. Alle personopplysninger vil behandles konfidensielt, og alle vil kodes med fiktive navn og bakgrunn. Deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonen, men det er mulig dere innad i gruppen vil kunne gjenkjenne hverandre basert på uttalelser dere har kommet med. I studiet benyttes tjenesten Nettskjema for opptak og lagring av intervju.

Frivillighet

Prosjektet baseres på prinsippet om frivillighet. Det betyr at du på hvilket som helst tidspunkt kan trekke samtykket ditt til deltakelse. Dersom du har spørsmål eller ønsker å trekke samtykke, ta kontakt med student Tord Carlsen eller veileder Jonathan Reams.

Samtykke

Jeg bekrefter at jeg har mottatt tilstrekkelig informasjon om studiet og samtykker basert på dette til deltakelse.

Observasjon	
Samtykke	

Signatur/dato:

_____

Appendix D – Godkjenning fra Sikt

◖◗ Sikt

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer	Vurderingstype	Dato
783243	Automatisk ❓	12.01.2023

Prosjekttittel

Feedback as a means for leadership development

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

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

Prosjektansvarlig

Jonathan Reams

Student

Tord Carlsen

Prosjektperiode

01.01.2023 - 01.01.2024

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 01.01.2024.

[Meldesk jema](#) ↗

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 lovovertredelser
- 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. 2/2