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Managers´ perception of leadership in the 21st Century:

A case study of how Swedish and German mid-level managers perceive leadership.

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Abstract

Title: Managers perception of leadership in the 21st Century: A case study of how Swedish and German mid-level managers perceive leadership.

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Purpose of study: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how mid-level managers within the manufacturing industry in our case study perceive leadership, and whether there exist differences in the perceptions of the Swedish and German mid-level managers of the same phenomenon.

Method: We have decided to conduct a case study of German and Swedish mid-level managers within the automobile industry. Primarily we used a qualitative method of investigation and a phenomenographical methodological approach in order to conduct an in depth analysis. We conducted semi-structured interviews with six mid-level managers each in Germany and Sweden. The semi-structured interviews allowed us to conduct flexible interviews which enabled these managers to speak relatively freely about their own view of leadership. Throughout our investigation we have based our results on the empirical findings and at the same time sought explanations to different phenomenon in relevant secondary data, such as management literature, thus used the abductive method of investigation.

Conclusion: Managers in our study view leadership as something positive, rewarding and inspiring, however every manager has to find his/her own golden middle way of leading. Leadership is seen as a developmental process which needs to be changed according to the situation. This phenomenon is a mutual relationship between managers and subordinates and the better this relationship is the more successful and better the leadership is. In our study, leadership in the 21 Century accounts for an extensive focus on Emotional Intelligence where people skills and coaching is the key to successful leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, mid-level manager, perception, culture, leadership style, communication, situational leadership

Preface

First and foremost we would like to thank everyone involved in making this MA-thesis possible. Throughout the research process we have gained a lot of useful insights into the manufacturing industry as well as the international business environment in general, thus has broaden our horizons. We are very delighted to have had the chance to meet personally with both the Swedish mid-level managers and their German counterparts. This thesis would not have been possible without their interest and time invested. Through encouragement and support this has eventually become possible to present in the form of a Master thesis.

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Lund, 2006

Max Otto

Emma Olsson

BLOCK 1

Block one is made up of three chapters. The first chapter consists of introduction, positioning, questions, definitions, purpose, delimitations and disposition. The second chapter consists of a description of the methodological approach we have been using throughout this thesis. Here we also explain our choice of case company, our interview guide, how the interviews were conducted as well as the literature we have been using. The third and last chapter gives the reader a theoretical background to the leadership phenomenon. This chapter we have kept relatively short, as our methodology suggests an open-minded, empirical path of discovery of phenomenon rather than results deriving from existing theories.

1. Introduction

“Leadership seems to be one of those qualities that you know when you see it, but it is difficult to describe it” (Doyle & Smith, 2001)

When researching the subject leadership one needs to consider the distinction between the meaning leader and manager as well as between informal and formal leaders. These expressions, however, has a limited value, since they do not give us an understanding about what leadership in reality is all about. Mintzberg among other authors even criticise the distinction between leaders and managers and argues that leadership basically can be understood as one, amongst many others, duties of managerial work. (Mintzberg, 1979). However, other researchers argue that managers carry out rather mundane tasks that perhaps should not all be described as being typical leadership duties. They stress that these rather mundane tasks are considered more special because of the fact that it is the manager or leader who is the one carrying them out. (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003).

One might confuse leadership with authority. Authority is on the one hand viewed by many as a possession of power which in turn is based upon a formal appointed role, i.e. the managerial role in an organizational setting. However, people who do not possess any formal position of power can very well enjoy informal authority. Here much confusion could arise because not all formally appointed managers are leaders as well as not all leaders are managers. In much of the contemporary literature, the term leadership comes across like a relatively complex area

of research. Leadership is a social phenomenon which depends upon its context where it is carried out and thus what constitutes good leadership in a particular organization could have the reverse effect in another organizational context. According to much of the contemporary literature there are many subjective thoughts and different definitions about what the term leadership means, what it entails and some even question the symbolic meaning of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). In other traditional perspectives of leadership, i.e. authoritarian, democratic or laissez-faire leadership styles, leadership as such is being defined in quite general terms. The ambition among most researchers is often to define leadership as something which is relevant in many different contexts and hence striving to find what constitutes for an effective leadership. However, every leader-subordinate relation within different cultural contexts and situations differs from one another and hence makes it hard for a researcher to find a definition of the phenomenon that makes it universally applicable. Yukl argues that apart from the process of a leader influencing the subordinates, different definitions of leadership does not have much in common. When defining leadership the problem arises that leadership then tends to be a too wide and unclear description. (Yukl, 1998).

Within the term “modern management leadership” Doyle and Smith (2001) identified four formations with common qualities that can be seen as variations of the classical view on leadership. These four variations consist of leadership traits, leadership behaviour, contingency theories and transformational theories. In the 1950s, they argue, certain leadership traits were identified that differentiated leaders from followers. However, in the ongoing debate today, researchers argue that there is no definite set of leadership traits but rather a combination of traits that could possibly suit certain situations and hence this question still remains an inexact social science. Furthermore, they stress that the way of approaching leadership since 1960s was to explore managers’ patterns of behaviour and their leadership styles. However, the same issues as with the attempt to find a set of particular leadership traits arouse, due to the fact that these researchers did not consider the specific context or setting in which the style was being used.

This then led to the next era in leadership research, namely the one to look for the context in which leadership is exercised and to the idea that leadership changes from one situation to the next. These researchers arrived at the conclusion that leaders need to change their style to suit the particular situation and thus the *contingency approach* was born. However, issues such as

cultural differences and gender issues were not taken into much consideration with these theories. This eventually led to an idea of visionary or transformational leadership which consider the more sophisticated demands of leaders which come from high levels of uncertainty experienced by both the leaders and their subordinates and also by entire organizations. Here the leader should be viewed as a *change agent*. (Doyle & Smith, 2001).

Together with the aforementioned current uncertainty about what leadership is, this thus brings us to ask ourselves and investigate; what are managers' perceptions of leadership and how do mid-level managers de facto perceive these expressions.

1.1 Positioning

None of the different generations of theories above are completely time-bound or even mutually exclusive and hence each generation has added to further debates on leadership. This indicates that it is an ongoing and open debate on leadership, and it awakened our interest and made us take part in this continuing and indeed challenging path of discovery. There exists much contemporary literature about leadership but less in depth qualitative studies of the same phenomenon. Hence, we find that due to the confusion within the themes in existing literature discussed above, this calls for further in-depth analysis of how leadership in reality is perceived. We find that there are still many questions calling for possible answers.

Furthermore, there are countless thoughts and studies about the difference between different countries regarding leadership, however mostly quantitative, for example Hofstede's huge studies about cultural differences. We wanted to investigate how the interviewed mid-level managers de facto perceive this; we found it especially interesting now as the company is integrating its operations in Germany and Sweden, and also what the German and Swedish leaders thought of one another. Hence, the multi-country approach was chosen in order to include, or exclude, the existence of possible cultural effects on managers' perception of leadership.

1.2 Purpose of study

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the mid-level managers within the manufacturing industry in our case study perceive leadership, and whether there exist differences in the perceptions of Swedish and German mid-level managers of the same phenomenon.

1.3 Target Group of Readers

We believe that it is of vital importance to have an intercultural awareness of different ways of conducting business and leading people. Thus, the main target group of readers is students, mid-level managers or people in general who are currently working or intending to work in an international environment, where this intercultural awareness can come into play. This study can also be viewed as an eye opener for current firms wanting to expand their business across cultural borders, hence especially companies in Germany or Sweden.

1.4 Delimitations of study

Our focus has been to research about managers' perceptions of leadership, as they are the ones being faced with leadership issues on a daily basis; this makes them a valid source of information when pursuing a deeper insight into the field of leadership. To increase the validity of the study, it would possibly have been a good thing to interview managers at more wholly owned companies. We are well aware that there could be other potential reasons to differences than the ones that we have covered. We are also aware of the fact that we are conducting our research at an American corporation, albeit in Europe. This could very well influence the answers related to culture and leadership, although one of the wholly owned companies has only been a true part of the mother company for two years. Also, we interviewed one German manager in Sweden and one Swedish manager in Germany, thus giving us access to valuable information from individuals having had long-term experience with both countries and working environments.

Almost all of the mid-level managers interviewed were either in a technical position or had a technical education, such as mechanical engineering. Therefore, our results are mainly applicable to this kind of managers, and it is a deliberate decision of ours to concentrate just on the leadership part of their work, not the technical part. Another significant delimitation is that the interviewed managers may have been inhibited by our recording device. This is only a

potential problem with the Swedish managers, as we were not allowed to have any recording equipment at the facility in Germany. In Germany we took extensive notes during the course of the interviews instead.

1.5 Definitions

Culture: The collective programming of the intellect, the will and the senses that distinguishes members of one group of humans from another. (Hofstede, 2005)

Leader: Someone who, formal or informal, performs a leadership role for a group of people.

Manager: A person who has been formally appointed to a position.

Mid-level manager: A person with other managers not only over but also under his or her own level in a hierarchy.

Perception: Is the process of acquiring, interpreting and organizing information from the senses.

Situational leadership: Different leadership is required in different situations

1.6 Disposition

This thesis is divided into two blocks. Block one is made up of two chapters. The first chapter consists of introduction, positioning, purpose of study, target group of readers, delimitations, definitions and disposition. The second chapter consists of a description of the method we have been using to conduct the interviews. Here we explain our choice of case company, methodological approach, research design and how the interviews were conducted.

The second block consists of three chapters; our empirical findings and analysis, results and conclusion. Chapter 4 starts off with a person gallery, first to allow the reader to get an overview of the managers being interviewed and second to put their talk of leadership in the right context. Thereafter our analysis of empirical findings follows, sorted by the main themes that the mid-level managers focused on when speaking about leadership. Chapter 5 reveals the results of the identified main categories within the themes discussed in our empirical findings & analysis. Finally, chapter 6 first recaps the study purpose; thereafter our conclusion is being made. The very last chapter gives suggestions for further research.

2. Method

2.1 Research design

In order to gain a deeper understanding of managers' perceptions of leadership we are using the *qualitative* research design. Within qualitative research, the social world is namely viewed as being constantly changing and is closely connected to the individuals living in it. We believe that by using the qualitative research design, this design will best allow us to mainly focus on how individuals understand their social reality, i.e. leadership in this case. (Bryman,1995).

Furthermore, we have chosen to conduct a case study which includes a total of twelve mid-level managers within the same large, multinational manufacturing industry in Sweden as well as in Germany. Our aim with this thesis has been to investigate unique perceptions in this particular case. However, we do not intend to make any generalizations that suit all mid-level managers' understanding of leadership in all kinds of organizational settings, but rather to analyse what perceptions are true for our particular case study. We wanted to carry out our investigation initially with an open mind and thereafter identify the main themes and draw possible conclusions related to our empirical findings.

2.2 Methodological approach

Within social science research and qualitative research design, one methodological approach is Phenomenography; an empirical, qualitative investigation of the different ways in which people experience and perceive certain phenomenon in a society. (Uljens,1989). In a phenomenographical study we try to interpret different understandings of a particular situation or phenomenon; leadership, from the perspective of the people being studied. By using this method we want to explore the differences in mid-level managers' perceptions and interpret the underlying meanings of the perceptions of the studied phenomenon. We have also chosen to take on a slightly post modernistic view¹ when conducting our research. People are the ones who construct reality and since the social world depends on certain contexts there are also many ways in which one interprets things. The knowledge we have found is thus relative,

¹ Our way of perceiving and interpreting our empirical findings has been to question what is often taken for granted. (Bryman, 1995)

every description and interpretation is based on one of many possible ways of understanding our case in a social context. (Bryman, 1995). Thus, to be able to analyse and interpret the perceptions of these mid-level managers we think it is important to consider the managers in their natural context. That is also why we decided to conduct the interviews at their offices.

In order to begin our analysis, we first sorted the data by similar emerging themes of leadership that we found managers had spoken about. Thereafter, again considering the phenomenographical method, we broke those themes down into different categories of expressions. First we analysed the similarities within the groups of perceptions and then the differences, in order to try to reach the underlying meaning of those expressions.

In other words, it was a reasoning process that started from our empirical findings and that derived likely explanations. To be able to do this we simultaneously considered other theories from secondary literature in order to gain some theoretical ground for a deeper analysis.

2.3 Semi-structured interviews

With the phenomenographical method in mind, the method for collecting data has been to conduct individual interviews. The case company was contacted in each country by means of telephone in order to get a contact person, who set us in contact with the different managers. Afterwards, a scheme was emailed to the managers, where we asked for data like name, telephone number and desired date and time for the interview. This was in order to make the process less time-consuming for the managers. We had booked eight interviews after about three weeks, but we got another four interviews through already booked managers whilst in Germany which brought the total number up to twelve, i.e. six interviews in each country.

We wanted these interviews to be as flexible as possible and allow the interviewees to speak as freely as possible about their leadership. Thus, we invited the interviewees to reflect on certain, individual experiences of leadership that mattered most to them. However, seeing as we were invited to Germany in order to conduct our interviews we felt obligated to at least have a set of already made up yet open questions, such as amount of time in their managerial position, educational background and reason for taking on the position, in order to quickly get started and maximize their and our time at the company. This resulted in our decision to conduct a semi-structured interview which would allow us to initially have some structure in

the interview. After our initial questions had been answered we encouraged the managers to speak freely about the subject which allowed them to add something they found important in this matter.

One has to be aware of a few significant details when talking about leadership in contemporary Germany. First of all, although the noun *Führer* means guide or leader when directly translated from German, and despite its use in words like *Geschäftsführer* (director) or *Führerschein*, (driver's license) it is not normally used by itself, as this is attached to some social stigma since WWII. For this reason we decided to instead use the words *Leiter* (which also means leader) and *manager* (which is taken from English, boss) when conducting our interviews.

2.4 Selection of case company

Our case company was chosen because of a number of reasons. First of all, it is a multinational company and its European part is represented both in Germany and Sweden which made it possible to investigate the second part of our stated purpose; whether there exist similar patterns of perceptions amongst the Swedish and German mid-level managers. Another reason for our choice of case company was that it has the necessary size to carry out a study of leadership since we found that this company entailed the needed levels of hierarchy and hence hypothetically the mid-level managers also had the exposure to management literature. Even though the size of the different divisions in both countries differed, more importantly the work of the managers conducted at the different locations was quite similar and a couple of the managers also had team members in both countries.

Mid-level managers are the ones that we believe are faced with leadership issues in their daily work and thus we aim to gain a deeper understanding of managers perceptions on leadership. Furthermore, having had the opportunity to analyse managers within the same corporate group in two different countries, where half of them are Swedish and half German, it is interesting to see whether there are any possible discrepancies in the perceptions of those managers concerning their view on leadership. If there are any such differences it would be interesting to be able to seek possible explanations to why these might exist.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Within qualitative research, Bryman and Bell argue that there are two basic criteria in order to judge a qualitative study, namely its trustworthiness and its authenticity. Furthermore, a qualitative study's trustworthiness also contains four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and a study's confirmability. (Bryman & Bell, 2003)

As there are different ways of understanding the phenomenon leadership rather than only one truth about our social world, the credibility of the results - which is the first criterion of trustworthiness - depend on how well researchers manage to follow the rules of the chosen research process and how well they manage to interpret the results. The second criterion of a study's trustworthiness is transferability. Qualitative researchers aim for thick descriptions, i.e. deeper descriptions rather than researching about a broader phenomenon. A study's transferability measures how well these descriptions can be transferred to other contexts. The third criterion, a study's dependability, has to do with the researcher carrying out auditing and how well he/she manages to describe each phase of the research process. A detailed report then allows colleagues to look into the quality of the chosen procedures of the researcher. Last but not least, the fourth criterion which is called confirmability means that the researcher, despite the fact that it is not possible to be fully objective within social research, still tries to make sure that he/she has researched to the best of his/her ability. It should be clear that the researcher has tried to remain as objective as possible throughout the research. (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

As noted earlier, the nature of qualitative research and our chosen phenomenographical research method requires delimiting the researched phenomenon as little as possible, but the interviews generated an extensive amount of raw data. Therefore, once all the interviews had been transcribed and before we started analyzing our material, we used a respondent validation exercise in order to increase the credibility of our understanding of the subjects' perceptions. Hence, to double check with our interviewees we sent back the interview transcripts to our respondents in order for them to check for our interpretation and factual accuracy.

Despite the fact that the method of auditing is rather time consuming, we did ask not only other researchers but also family and friends to read through and evaluate the quality of our

procedures and results reached. This we did in order to measure the third and fourth criterion of trustworthiness – dependability and confirmability.

Authenticity means amongst other things to what extent the study reflects a fair picture of the people who has been studied. We think that our study does give a fair picture of the people being studied, seeing as our aim has been to investigate perceptions of these particular mid-level managers within the manufacturing industry.

3. Theory

3.1 The concepts leader and manager

The research that has been done in the literature does not give a clear definition of the two concepts management and leadership. For example, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) state that;

"Leadership occurs any time one attempts to influence the behaviour of an individual or group, regardless of the reason [] Management is a kind of leadership in which the achievement of organizational goals is paramount." (Page 3)

They do not distinguish the two concepts from another but rather states that management is a specific kind of leadership. Mintzberg (1979), on the contrary, says that leadership is a part of the management frame. One could, for example argue that a manager does not spend the whole working day conducting leadership, instead conducting administrative tasks, and presenting results at meetings. These different views clearly point out the difficulty in distinguishing the two concepts.

Others, like Zaleznik (1977) and Bennis (1989) however, explicitly state that there are indeed differences between the concepts, and Kotter (1999) also states this by saying:

"Leadership is different from management, but not for the reasons most people think. It has nothing to do with having charisma or other exotic personality traits. It is not the province of the chosen few. Nor is leadership necessarily better than management or a replacement for it. Both are necessary for success in a complex and volatile business environment." (page 51)

In conclusion, there is no single definition of leadership available, and neither is there consensus as to if management and leadership is indeed the same thing or not in the literature.

3.2 Cultural Differences

Hofstede (1991) conducted hundreds of thousands of interviews and surveys all over the world at one company, namely IBM, in order to describe cultural differences. In short, he divided the differences into four dimensions, or scales, with the extremes, or low and high on each end of the scale and the scale being relative. The four dimensions are power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculine/feminine and uncertainty avoidance. Power distance is about the felt distance between manager and employee, or between any such felt differences, where a high power distance suggests a formal relationship between manager and subordinate and vast status differences, while the opposite is true for a low one. Individualism/collectivism has to do with which of these society promotes, where a high individualism score suggests that the individual is more important than the collective and the other way around. Masculine in the masculine/feminine dimension means that status and power is important and that managers are expected to be resolute and self-assertive, while feminine cultures are characterized by people and relations being important and where cooperation between colleagues is prioritized. High uncertainty avoidance, on the other hand is characterized by reluctance to delegate, lesser propensity to make compromises, and “time is money”. His results show that Germany and Sweden are quite similar on two of his dimension scales, individualism/collectivism and power distance, although Germany is slightly more collectivist and has a little more power distance. The big differences are in uncertainty avoidance and masculine/feminine. Sweden is the most feminine of all countries in Hofstedes study, while Germany is in the masculine midfield and in uncertainty avoidance, Germany is much more avoidant than Sweden, which according to him shows in Germans questioning the need to delegate, whereas Swedes do the opposite. (Hofstede, 1991)

However, we have also looked at a few other sources who question these theses. We have to keep in mind that Hofstedes studies have been conducted since the sixties and the same cultural patterns does not necessarily have to persist for eternity. Few countries have as many stereotypes connected to their style of management than Germany. As Lawrence and Edwards (2000) put it, “*For more than half a century, Germany has been economically successful in spite of defying the laws of business and management.*” and continues by stating that German managers are seen generally stiff, person-oriented rather than system-oriented, German management is seen as weak on delegation, and also weak on marketing. Generally, also,

German management is in this study seen as on one hand rigid and bureaucratic, while on the other hand structured and industrious. Some of these stereotypes refer back to WWII propaganda or even further. (www.expatica.com) These stereotypes are questioned further in a study by Lawrence (1998) which states that the common perception that Germans are more authoritarian and more of the “orders are orders” school is not true, as Germans tended to agree more to “Employees at all levels should be consulted on matters of company policy and operation” than British managers, and German managers also were more inclined to support a statement like “Everyone, whatever their status, should have the right to say what they think”. Now, this holds true for German vs. British managers only, but according to Hofstede (1991), Britain is on par with Germany and the United States on the masculinity versus femininity scale while Sweden is much more feminine, i.e. suggesting a more collegial and not an authoritarian style. Management in Sweden, on the other hand, is according to Lawrence and Edwards (2000) characterized by consensus, which can be seen in for example “Saltsjöbadsandan” (Spirit of Saltsjöbaden) in 1938.² Swedish leadership is seen as less aggressive than German, or generally when measured against other countries.

3.3. The importance of delegation and Emotional Intelligence

Much of the literature today argues that it is important for a leader to delegate work to subordinates. As a manager one should strive to delegate certain duties to subordinates in order to 1) gain more time to carry out other tasks and 2) to stimulate subordinates to work independently and develop their competencies further. To delegate efficiently means to delegate a task to a subordinate that is likely to have the competence to carry out the task. However, one must not forget the importance of following up and helping this subordinate out, in case problems arise. (Christerson, 2005; Irving, 2005; Yukl, 1998). Kets de Vries takes this a step further, by stating that people who fail to delegate work usually also do this because they want to avoid conflicts. The reason for this is because managers do not have faith in their subordinates and thus micromanages instead. (Kets de Vries, 2002).

² A meeting where representatives from the Swedish employer’s federation (SAF) and the trade union umbrella organization (LO) decided among other things that disputes should be carried out without any strikes or equivalent measures. The spirit in itself is also about “mutual accommodation, bargaining, and compromise.” (Lawrence and Edwards, 2000)

When delegating work it is thus important for the leader to become dispensable. (Blanchard & Johnson, 1994; Christerson, 2005; Frenkel, 2005; Irving, 2005) This is due to a couple of different reasons. First and foremost, it is important that the leader trust the competence of ones subordinates and let the responsibility for the task depend on the subordinate. This will allow the subordinate freedom to make own decisions and the subordinate will most probably not only grow as a person but also develop further competence, which in turn will have a positive effect upon the organisation in the long run. Secondly, this allows more time for the leader to carry out his/her other tasks optimal without having to do work that subordinates and specialists de facto do better and perhaps even faster. If the leader fails to understand the importance of delegation and importance of becoming dispensable the danger of creating what Irving calls “metarule” will arise³.

Researchers have conducted studies on which particular leadership traits were successful in today’s business environment. (Kets de Vries, 2002; Goleman, 1998). They agree that leaders’ soft skills, such as social competence and emotional intelligence, are the key to successful leadership. A manager has to actively listen to his/her subordinates and needs to aim to develop subordinates individually as well as within the team. The five components of Emotional Intelligence, they argue, are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Goleman even states that leaders with this kind of intelligence are more respected amongst subordinates and colleagues alike. The greatest leaders are the ones who fully understand and know their subordinates and who brings out new, creative ideas from their team members. (Goleman, 1998; Kets de Vries, 2002)

To bring the so called Emotional Intelligence one step further, leaders who possess this intelligence often act as a coach towards his/her subordinates. The term coaching in an organizational setting means to improve the performance of an individual or a team. A coach does this by directing and supporting subordinates and the team through asking questions, encouragement, assessing strengths and weaknesses of individuals and teams and addresses needed changes. (Goleman, 2002) Coaching derives first and foremost through empathy and in close relation to the co workers. Furthermore, a manager who coaches helps subordinates to

³ Metarule is: “The result of the metarule is the creation of two forces that counteract the decentralization that can really harm the workflow. These forces rely on the competence of only the manager at the same time as they inhibit the independence and creativity of the subordinates.” (Irving, p.31, 2005)

discover their strengths and weaknesses and hopefully also helps to match those with their personal as well as carrier goals. However this is only possible if the leader really aim to get to know his/her subordinates. (Goleman, 2002; Irving, 2005; Yukl, 1998).

3.4. Contingency perspectives on leadership

The 1960’s dissatisfaction with trait-based theories of leadership led to a development of theories of contingency leadership. Fred Fiedler, Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey were early pioneers in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Fiedler argues that key determinants of the leadership situation are the degree to which the leader structures a task and the degree to which subordinates trust the leader. Furthermore, he found that both a relationship oriented and a task oriented style would work, if only it would fit characteristics of the situation. (Fiedler, 1967).

Furthermore, the management guru, Ken Blanchard, who is famous for his “One-Minute-Manager” book series and Paul Hersey identified a type of leadership theory which they called the situational leadership style. This theory presumes that in different situations it is better with different leadership styles. According to them, a good leader is someone who is able to quickly change style according to the social context they are acting in. (1986)

Blanchard and Hersey together created a leadership model that allows people to analyse the needs of a certain situation and then adopt the best leadership style accordingly. It is on the concepts leadership style and the development level of the subordinates which this model rests. They categorized styles into four behaviour types, which they named S1 through S4:

<p>Supporting – S3</p> <p>Pass day-to-day tasks to follower, let control be with the follower</p>	<p>Coaching – S2</p> <p>Define tasks but strive to get ideas from followers</p>
<p>Delegating – S4</p> <p>The follower is in control and decides when leader will be involved</p>	<p>Directing – S1</p> <p>Define tasks and supervise followers closely</p>

It is however important to remember, that no style is optimal for all leaders to possess, since effective leaders, so they argue, need to adapt according to the situation. Thus, it will depend

on the person being led, the subordinate. The style should therefore be based upon commitment and competence of their followers. The development of subordinates they also categorized into four levels, D1 through D4:

<p>High competence,diff. commitment – D3 Experienced but might lack confidence or motivation</p>	<p>Some competence, Low commitment - D2 Have relevant skills but need help as task might be new</p>
<p>High competence, high commitment – D4 Experienced and confident, might be more skilled than leader</p>	<p>Low competence, High commitment – D1 Lack specific skills but eager to learn</p>

For an optimal match of the two concepts, they argue that S1-S4 of the leader should correspond to the subordinate’s development level D1-D4.

BLOCK 2

This block consists of three chapters; our empirical findings and analysis, results and conclusion. Chapter 4 starts off with a person gallery, first to allow the reader to get an overview of the managers being interviewed and second to put their talk of leadership in the right context. Thereafter follows our analysis of the empirical findings, sorted by the main themes that the mid-level managers focused on when speaking about leadership. Chapter 5 reveals the results of the empirical findings and analysis. With the phenomenographical method in mind, the results are the categories derived from the themes. Chapter 6 first recaps the study purpose; thereafter our conclusion is being made. The very last chapter gives suggestions for further research.

4. Empirical findings and Analysis

4.1 Person Gallery

Andersson

Andersson's field of work is the development of accessories. He is responsible for 20 subordinates legally and 25 functionally. He has been a mid-level manager for 20 years. He became a manager because of reorganization and was asked if he wanted a promotion. We conducted our interview with Andersson in a booked meeting room with closed doors, directly at the plant he is working at.

Bengtsson

He is a senior manager of vehicle systems at the Swedish facility, and is responsible for about 430 people. He is originally from Germany, where he worked as a quality manager in a major German company, but came to Sweden in 1991, and has worked in a managerial position there since about 1995. This interview was conducted in the cafeteria, which was empty, because we were not allowed to take the camera phone we used as a Dictaphone into the compound.

Carlsson

Carlsson is the purchasing director for the Swedish facility, with about one hundred subordinates. He has had this position for almost two years. We met him in the same cafeteria, also because of security reasons, seeing as we were not allowed to use the camera as a Dictaphone.

Danielsson

He is a production manager, in relation to most of the other managers a relatively low-level managerial position. He is the only one wearing working clothes during the interview. Danielsson is responsible for 16 subordinates, who are divided into three teams in three different factories inside the compound. He was appointed a managerial position in 1995, but had no clear career plan or specific desire to be a manager. We had the same problem with the recording equipment here, and we decided to carry out the first half of the interview in a small room at the entrance, and the other half in a presentation room; because the presentation room was being used during the first 20 minutes.

Eriksson

Eriksson is chief accountant and assistant treasurer at the company and the only non-technician in our study. She has eight subordinates, four in accounting and four in treasuring. She has been in this position for two years, and in the company for a total of five years, her former role was group manager, her current position is the level above this.

Johansson

Johansson comes from Sweden but is currently working in Germany, and about 35 years old. He is a project manager at the German facility, with no formal subordinates. In the projects he leads he has this responsibility though. He has had this position since 2004, and had his first managerial experience about ten years ago.

Schneider

Schneider is the manager of Vehicle Safety Development and is responsible for the Crash test. He has a total of 37 subordinates, 5 of them reporting directly. Schneider started in the company in 1996 as a group manager. He met us at the entrance and showed us around, not

only in the Vehicle Safety Development department but also in departments sited next to his office. After approximately half an hour of showing us around, letting us see different equipment being used for their crash tests, we decided to get started with the semi-structured interview. He invited us in to his office which was sited directly next to the workshop with a door dividing him and the secretary to keep out the noise from the daily crash tests in the workshop. We were offered coffee and cake and shortly thereafter the interview began.

Müller

Müller is the manager for Press Globalization & Coordination in Germany and has 12 subordinates. He has been a mid-level manager since 1988, and has been working in the USA for 3 years. Thereafter he started working with the globalization departments but received the chance for a job position 6 years ago. Müller started to work for the company in 1966. This department is made up of an open planned office and partially enclosed workspace where every workers office looks similar. There are no doors which separate the people from one another and there is an informal atmosphere where people are walking in and out from each others offices without any problem.

Fischer

He is manager over ME Press Planning and has a total of 26 subordinates. As Fischer found out that we were doing interviews in the same department he was kind enough to find time for an interview with us. The office is a partially enclosed workspace with no door. Colleagues walk relatively freely in and out of this office making it relatively informal.

Schmidt

He is the manager for MEP-Steel in Quality & Technical Application in Germany and has in total 19 subordinates, formal managerial and HR responsibility for 10 of those. He has a PhD in mechanical engineering. His office is sited next to Fischer and is thus also made up of partially enclosed workspace with no doors separating people from walking in and out of his office.

Weber

He is primarily a mechanical engineer and is the manager of Concept Vehicle Build. He has a total of 31 subordinates with 3 of them working in Sweden. Schmidt is kind enough to bring us to the department where Weber works. Our interview begins by him showing us around the

department, also showing us some of the concept cars they are developing there. He shows us to his office which is sited in the corner of a fairly open planned office with no doors. His office was sited in direct connection to the rest of his team-members. He tells us that he would have liked it better if he would have sat in an office space in between his subordinates to get a better overview of his team-members and also to have a better possibility to help out the subordinates if problems arise, instead of in the corner.

Becker

He is the manager of Chassi Vehicle Dynamics. He has a total of 4 direct subordinates with one team split up between Germany and Sweden. This department looks like an open plan cubical with an open landscape, hardly any flowers or colours and smelled of old smoke. We find his office in the corner of the cubical like landscape; the office is divided by a closed door. As we arrive to conduct the interview it turns out that he is double-booked so we get ourselves an own desk within this cubical like department whilst waiting to start our interview. After approx. an hour we are invited in to his office and we start off by asking him our initial questions.

4.2. How the analysis is carried out

We have divided our analysis of the empirical findings into four main themes; namely the distinction between manager and leader, cultural difference, leadership as a developmental process and finally leadership style.

With the phenomenographical method in mind, in the analysis process we broke down each theme further into specific categories. In order to do this we formed groups, i.e. categories containing similar expressions derived from the interviews. Thereafter we interpreted each of these groups of expressions one after another.

4.3. Managers perception of the distinction between manager and leader

4.3.1. Clear distinction

<i>"You are appointed a managerial position, whereas you earn the title leader"</i>	<i>(Andersson)</i>
<i>"One is a leader but one gets appointed manager"</i>	<i>(Johansson)</i>
<i>"A leader makes his/her subordinates work toward a common goal, while a manager is something you get appointed to"</i>	<i>(Carlsson)</i>
<i>"A manager points with the entire hand, whereas a leader develops an independent subordinate"</i>	<i>(Danielsson)</i>
<i>"A manager manages the business processes, a leader strongly leads"</i>	<i>(Becker)</i>

The first group of expressions, hence the first category, all show that the words leader and manager are perceived as different concepts with different underlying meanings.

According to five managers, four being Swedish, you become a manager while leadership qualities are something you either must deserve or simply just have. Interestingly, this second view is seen as obsolete in the contemporary literature, (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003) which is interesting considering that the Swedes otherwise seem to speak more along the lines of newer leadership stances, suggesting that leadership can only be learned, hence there is no such thing as a true born leader (Doyle & Smith, 2001). In the case of having to deserve leadership though, a learning process is implied, which is in line with the theory. We interpret this as the manager being aware that no one is indeed born with all leadership qualities, even if some personality traits are most probably helpful, an opinion expressed by Schneider and Weber when they talked about successful leadership.

The last quote deviates from the others and makes it clear that where the Swedes tended to distinguish between the concepts, this German manager distinguishes on a process level. The quote is also almost the exact opposite of the fourth one, where Danielsson perceives the manager to be the one that strongly leads whereas Becker seems to perceive that it is the leader who is doing it. This makes it obvious that while the two managers both make a clear difference between the concepts; they have very different ideas about what they mean. Becker's quote is along the lines of Barker (1997) where the managerial tasks are considered static and creating stability, while the leader is working for change. Here, the leader is seen as the strong, one could even say heroic visionary who leads his troops, or subordinates, into battle. Danielsson on the other hand uses the metaphor "to point with the whole hand" which in this context has a negative flavour but also says that a leader develops, and development is also a kind of change. So even though those two managers say the opposite, in both cases the leader stands for dynamic change and the manager for rigidity and stability. However, this does not make us more certain that they see a difference; instead it underlines our finding that the managers do not have a common definition of the concepts.

Furthermore, when speaking about the term leader, two managers in Sweden (of which one, Bengtsson is a German expatriate) and a German manager, use a soccer metaphor for a/coach relationship and two managers use parent/child relationship examples, whereas the German counterparts use the military metaphor. While this might be a coincidence, it might have something to do with the different associations the concepts bring. We can elaborate on this by stating that it probably has to do with culture, and also the education the different managers have. The engineering profession has strong military connections in both countries,

and if we look at Hofstede's scale, one of the things that sets Swedes and Germans apart is that the Swedes get high points for feminine, and Germans get high points for masculine on Hofstede's masculinity/femininity scale. If we were to connect the metaphors with these dimensions, then Bengtsson seem to also be drifting along the scale towards the more Swedish feminine part, instead of the more masculine, that is power is regarded highly and a stricter, almost military view is prevalent where the leader is the solo decision maker. It is hard, however to draw a conclusion. There does not seem to be a clear line in this regard.

4.3.2. Absence of distinction

<i>"The word "manager" is derived from the circus, but there is no big distinction"</i>	<i>(Schneider)</i>
<i>"In the past, a leader was seen as more important than a manager, but that is not the case today. Nowadays both a leader and a manager are expected to create an atmosphere within the company which enables all workers to feel good and feel that they are doing important tasks."</i>	<i>(Weber)</i>
<i>"The terms leader and manager are only German and English expressions for the same thing"</i>	<i>(Fischer)</i>
<i>„I do not distinguish [between these terms]"</i>	<i>(Schmidt)</i>

According to the second category of perceptions, there is no clear distinction between the concepts. The Germans speak of business processes and other rather technical aspects; they also tend to speak more in terms of co workers and responsibility instead of the formality differences primarily discussed by the Swedes. This also support our previous notion that the Germans are more technology-oriented, or at least think more in those terms, which might have to do with all of them having a technical education, and that this education generally was on a higher level than that of their Swedish counterparts. The first quote probably does not mean much more than that management is just a word, and that there isn't much of a

distinction. The second quote explains that, in the past, the leader had broader tasks than the manager. While we can relate this to what Hersey and Blanchard (1982) says about management being a kind of leadership, it has to be noted that the manager says that *it was seen* and not that he thinks so, thus citing an according to him prevailing understanding, and not his own view. If this is the prevailing view, it may be the reason why the German managers mostly do not see a distinction. The second sentence in the second quote is in line with what Deming considers to be key; the idea of empowering the subordinates. (1986)

These two last understandings show an absence of distinction between the concepts of leader and manager. As a certain way of understanding a particular phenomenon is a way of being aware of it, most of the managers in the German group of managers are clearly not aware of any difference in these terms. To them, a leader and manager seem to be the same thing and their interpretations seem to show that they have not reflected upon this prior to our interview. As stated in the method chapter, we abstained from using the word “*Führer*” because of its social stigma. But it is still interesting that, with one exception, only German managers did conclude that the concepts were synonymous. This could have a number of reasons ranging from cultural differences and the possibility that it is linked to interpretation as mentioned under subchapter 2.3 above, to the simple fact that the word “manager” has not been in the German language for a long time.

The only thing we can conclude here, is that what the words “manager” and “leader” mean to different managers in different countries, is highly dependent upon context and that there is no simple and easy definition that everyone can agree upon.

4.4 Managers perception of cultural differences

4.4.1 hierarchy/soft

<p><i>“I think there is a big difference between Swedish and German leadership. Germans care more about hierarchies whereas Swedes focus more on what is being said than who is saying it. [] Of course there is a hierarchy in Sweden also but it is not as heavy as the one in Germany, there is space for more initiative”</i></p>	<p>(Andersson)</p>
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<i>“If [in Germany] Person A wants Person B to do something, he first has to ask his own Manager who then talks to Person Bs Manager, and in this way they are very hierarchical.</i>	<i>(Andersson)</i>
<i>[About German leadership] “The question is how the subordinates see it, if there are not any conflicts, then there are no problems either.”</i>	<i>(Bengtsson)</i>
<i>“I always use “Du” to address my subordinates, in order to get a more informal environment to enhance team spirit”</i>	<i>(Schneider)</i>
<i>“I think that the relation manager-subordinate is closer in Sweden. The fatherly role does not exist in Germany, the people here have got to help themselves on their own”</i>	<i>(Becker)</i>
<i>“[one of the most important roles of a manager] is to be like a good Grandfather [to the subordinates]”</i>	<i>(Müller)</i>
<i>“The manager they had before me was very authoritarian, they have to get used to a more cooperative style now”</i>	<i>(Fischer)</i>

The third category of expressions seems to indicate perceptions of differences in the hierarchies.

The first two quotes are related; in the sense that they describe the general feeling most of the Swedish managers have about their German colleagues. A few other Swedish managers are to be of the same opinion, which seems to confirm this perception among them. None of the German managers comment on this though, the ones who bring up differences only talk about discipline, not hierarchy. Especially the second quote can be connected to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance-dimension, because taking the route along the existing hierarchy is indeed a way to avoid uncertainty. When a request goes through multiple levels, the chance of finding an error rises, to the detriment of effectivity. Our Swedish managers seem to think that the Germans are in need of control, that they need to know what their subordinates do.

Andersson elaborates on the subject by saying that he uses different ways of communicating with his Swedish and his German subordinates, where he is more direct with the German ones, and afterwards states that this is needed. There is no reason to object to this, but another reason could be that since the Swedes expect a certain behaviour from the Germans, they use an according to their interpretation "correct" way when communicating with them and thus incite a self-fulfilling prophecy. Andersson here thinks that he needs to, but does not specify why or if the procedure used among Swedes have been tried at all. This behaviour is however along the lines of the myth about the Germans being rigid and bureaucratic mentioned in the theory chapter, and also the first quote above, that there is more room for initiative in Sweden.

To use the more informal *Du*, as Schneider does in the fourth quote, instead of *Sie* (both represented by *You* in English) is seen by him as a way to get a more informal working environment, while none of the Swedish had even thought very much about it (probably a result of the Swedes being used to saying *Du* for the last 40 years). None of the other managers in Germany spoke about this, but they tended to use the more informal *Du* when giving examples during the interviews. We interpret this to mean that the myth of the Germans being highly formal is exactly that, a myth, because we have not found much in the interviews where the Germans actually support this myth.

Schneider's opinion can be seen as a desire for change and a way to use a more team-oriented approach to management - a step away from the formal hierarchy. What is interesting is that he also said that some subordinates were reluctant to address him with *Du*, indicating that the distance that results from using the more formal *Sie* is not just something that comes from above in the hierarchy but is something that is deeply integrated in the culture. In the light of the last quote by Fischer, together with Schneider's opinion, it seems that something has happened or is about to happen in Germany, at least as they seem to view it. The old ways do not work anymore and have lost their relevance.

The fifth quote has to do with the role of a manager; Becker dislikes the lack of a "fatherly" role for a manager in Germany. On the other hand, Müller thinks that a manager should be a grandfather for the subordinates whom we indicate as someone who supports them. These statements, however, do not contradict each other, the first is probably in comparison to Swedish, or perceived Swedish circumstances, while the other is how things, according to Müller, should be. But the quotes have that in common that they view this fatherly – or

grandfatherly – role as something to strive for, and the first also seem to think that the Swedish way regarding this subject is the better one, something which also support the claim made above, that something indeed seem to have happened to the way the Germans look at management. Thus, Germans seem to perceive Swedish managers to have a closer relationship with subordinates and that Germans seem to strive for the same close relationship with their subordinates.

On the other hand, many of the Swedish managers say that they sometimes feel that they are too soft, and want to be more direct and determined. This can be interpreted as each category of managers wanting something that they do not have, the Swedish more authority and the German a more relaxed role. Especially Johansson seem to think that both cultures have their advantages and that there is no optimal answer to this question, but that it is a trade-off.

But it can also be interpreted as both the Germans and the Swedes tend to become more affiliated with the American culture of the company seeing as two of the Swedes on the other hand see themselves as too kind and wish to be more direct. An argument against this however, could possibly be that even though the German part of the company has been in American ownership since 1929 and some converging towards the American way of conducting business probably already should have occurred, managers seem to think that the company still has their own company culture. What also speaks for the former interpretation is that the theoretical studies of Deming, the main creator of the Total Quality Management (TQM) methodology (1986) have been saying that consensus and trust is de facto better than fear and authority for at least the last twenty years and that fear thus does not belong in conducting good management, and that barriers should be broken in staff areas, in this case promote teamwork. All but one of the German managers state either that authority is outright bad or emphasize how good they are at being collegial and team players, which we see as supporting our claim.

One thing that a few Swedish managers brought up was that German managers more often were skilled technicians than Swedish, and the German managers confirm this, both through them all being engineers, and also because they tend to cater for the technical part of the work in their talk. We think that this represents different views of the manager in the both countries. In Germany, it is seen as more important that a manager has a deep understanding of what his or her subordinates are doing and also that the managers mostly have been recruited among

the engineers on the level below, which might contribute to the higher importance of the hierarchy in Germany.

4.4.2. Authoritative / democratic

<i>“In Germany the leaders act more authoritative. I think that German managers enjoy leadership because of the additional power”</i>	<i>(Carlsson)</i>
<i>“Being in Germany, I have noticed that I have a typical Swedish leadership, open minded and perhaps a little soft”</i>	<i>(Johansson)</i>
<i>“It’s the old leadership school here, management by fear”</i>	<i>(Johansson)</i>
<i>“The differences between us [Germans and Swedes] can only be seen when we are apart, when we are together they are not there”</i>	<i>(Weber)</i>
<i>“The manager they had before me was very authoritarian, they have to get used to a more cooperative style now”</i>	<i>(Fischer)</i>

The fourth category of expressions consists of similar perceptions of cultural differences about authoritative versus democratic leadership. The second quote comes from Johansson, who is a Swedish manager but working in Germany. It basically sums up exactly what the Swedish managers seem to think about their German counterparts. As previously stated about their view on hierarchy above, we found that the Swedish managers without any hesitation said that the Germans were more authoritarian, but that the Germans did not perceive themselves likewise. One thing that has to be kept in mind here though is that we are talking about what a single Swedish manager says here, and that all the German managers say the opposite. Our results mainly thus seem to contradict Hofstede’s (1991) results, since the true difference is that the Germans think that they have changed their behaviour and strive to be more collegial and kind - one sense they seem to have abandoned the “Management by fear” paradigm for a more co operational one.

Swedish managers on the whole say that there are differences, but besides them saying that there are, we cannot find much in the findings that confirms them. There is a discrepancy in what they are stating regarding this issue and with what they say about how a good leader should be, while the answers are almost identical between the two countries. Many of the managers believe that there are differences between Swedish and German leadership but according to our findings, they are miniscule.

We continue the analysis in 4.4.1. by again discussing the myth that Germans are more authoritarian than their Swedish counterparts, but here we are investigating it from another perspective; We believe that the problem lies in the definition of authoritarian person. Hofstede et al argues that Germans are more masculine i.e. more authoritarian, according to these studies; however our empirical findings tell us otherwise. Hence we think the Swedish perception of Germans, coupled with the German definition of authoritarian being different than the Swedish make these different perception frames possible.

Of particular interest are Johanssons' quotes, which are the contrary to what the Germans say about themselves. We interpret this as there is a clear difference in how authority is perceived by the different managers in different countries.

4.4.3. Free spirit / obedience

<p><i>“One cultural shock I have experienced is that everything is decided by the manager, because he knows the best. [] You are not allowed to act as freely in Germany.”</i></p>	<p><i>(Johansson)</i></p>
<p><i>“Swedish colleagues sometimes feel that we are constricting their freedom, while we feel that they can be like an anthill over there. Germans are more obedient and disciplined”</i></p>	<p><i>(Becker)</i></p>

The fifth category describes how managers perceive freedom to make decisions and obedience. Becker says here that the Germans are more disciplined than the Swedes who in his opinion are more free-spirited. This is contrary to what Lawrence (1998) says about the Germans, that their strong authoritarianism is a myth and that they actually are relatively team-oriented, at least when the German managers' opinions are considered. It is interesting to see that the German manager working in Sweden, Bengtsson, also seems to talk according to the myth, indicating that something has happened in Germany since he left, or that his perception has changed since he has been living for the last 5 years in Sweden. The fact that both Bengtsson and Becker points out that there are differences, but that they are most probably deeply rooted within ones perceptions and thus not visible directly, also suggest that the usual prejudices, which is for the greatest part very shallow are indeed just myths. Our observations at the German location did not suggest more authority; the general feeling was rather of a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The Swedes say that they delegate more than the Germans do but we could not find much proof of this in the talk of the Germans.

Becker also talks about geographical context and the importance of the relation between trade unions and the company for the culture, and his idea is that the differences are more because the German compound is in a densely populated area and the Swedish in more rural surroundings support another thought, that the differences do not have so much to do with the country but more with the local environment, that the different cultural behaviour can be attributed to different lifestyles.

4.5. Leadership as a developmental process

4.5.1 Leadership development on a team based level

<p><i>"[about what a leaders should be like] It is important to encourage subordinates to have many own ideas, so that the leader does not have to do everyone's job"</i></p>	<p>(Eriksson)</p>
<p><i>"Ideally a job is carried out in teams. A good job is only carried out where there are happy workers and its important to make sure that subordinates find their assignments interesting and fulfilling"</i></p>	<p>(Weber)</p>

<i>“A leader must handle HRM and definitely care about each team member. Ideally, every team-member in the department should share the same interests”</i>	<i>(Becker)</i>
<i>“ I strive to develop the team and to line up everyone in the same direction so that decisions can be made by subordinates themselves”</i>	<i>(Fischer)</i>
<i>“Leadership is like a soccer game”</i>	<i>(Mueller)</i>
<i>“If a leader always make all the decisions, the subordinates do not dare to do anything before asking you, and then you become a bottle neck”</i>	<i>(Andersson)</i>

This sixth category of expressions handles team development. Even though there are differences between each mid-level manager’s expressions that we interviewed, they all seem to perceive that developing the team is an important aspect of leadership. They all seem to strive for developing their personnel and make the tasks of the subordinates easier by giving them the prerequisites for decision making. The managers perceive trust as a key to successful leadership by indicating the importance to develop independent subordinates yet members who work together in the same direction being team players. They seem to say that only if subordinates trust their leader they are able to make decisions on their own, become independent and thus gain further competence. Hence, on a managers individual level, to gain respect and trust they suggest that a leader must know what he wants and where to go, know him/herself and therefore knows how he comes across amongst others.

Weber chose to take on the position as a mid-level manager because he perceives that one can accomplish more through working in a team than trying to accomplish something on ones own. His understanding is also suggested by Goleman, who argues that in the past twenty years, much research indicates that groups de facto make better decisions than do individuals themselves. (2002) However, we argue that this can only be true if we speak about a harmonic and cooperative team, otherwise we doubt the above statement. Webers’ perception, according to the quote above, means that a good job can only be carried out where there are happy workers, otherwise not. According to Weber, it is the task of the leader to make sure that subordinates find their assignments interesting and fulfilling, since happy team-members that are content with their work also perform well. However, in order to achieve happiness

and a feeling of fulfilment amongst the subordinates, he seems to mean that a manager needs to get to know his team members. Not only by chatting and being a good listener but most probably also give them constant feedback in order to encourage them, motivate them and basically make them dare making decisions on their own.

Becker expressed his strive to create a team where everybody share the same interest. That everyone should share the same interest could seem peculiar at firsts, but we interpret this as that everybody should work in the same direction. Becker namely told us an anecdote from a workshop that the Germans and Swedes recently have had. The purpose of this workshop was to see how well they worked together as a team, seeing as the teams get more and more global today. He told us that the mixed team of Swedish and German managers managed to build a campsite within a certain timeframe together, without too much conflicts and arguments. Apparently they were the first team to manage this task. By retelling this anecdote he seems to mean that to head in the same direction and to work towards the same goal, is to share the same interest.

Eriksson, Becker and Andersson also express their view about developing independent subordinates, however, their way of expressing it differs. Eriksson understanding is that it is a lot about getting everyone to understand what has to be done, so that they can develop own ideas of how to get there. Her understanding seems to be that a leader should not inhibit the creativity of its subordinates and thus delegate work. Andersson seems to stress the importance of showing in which direction you are going, because if you do not, you are going to become a bottleneck in the organization. If a leader does not give others space as well, it would be an inhibiting factor for the group. The result of this may be that you have very competent subordinates who are not using his/her competence because the leader does not let them. Becker elaborates upon the same theme and makes a connection to sports when expressing leadership. According to him leadership is like a soccer game where the referee is almost invisible; the game goes on without him having to hand out any red or yellow cards. Our interpretation of their different expressions is that they think that a leader should aim to become dispensable; the subordinates should know what to do without the leader being there the whole time. To become dispensable as a leader would namely mean that the leader, through delegation, will have more time to carry out his/her own tasks and at the same time encourages team members to carry out tasks independently and thus gain additional competence. (Blanchard & Johnsson, 1994; Irving, 2005; Frenkel,2005)

We believe that the managers have understood the danger of the meta-rule discussed in our theory chapter, seeing as he seem to perceive that becoming dispensable, i.e. not to make everything depend on the manager, to be very important. (Irving, 2005).

4.5.2. Leadership development on a personal level

<i>“It is important to be able to relax as a manager in order to allow time for self-reflection. I make mistakes every day so leadership is a constant developmental process.”</i>	<i>(Bengtsson)</i>
<i>“In order to lead you need to learn by doing, by getting to know your own and your teams limits”</i>	<i>(Weber)</i>
<i>“Learning by doing is the best way to learn leadership, which is connected to gained experience”</i>	<i>(Schneider and Johansson)</i>
<i>“You change as a person when you become a manager. I use my gut feeling and antennae in my leadership”</i>	<i>(Andersson)</i>
<i>“it takes years to develop your leadership. Always walk the talk. I use material from different leadership seminars sometimes”</i>	<i>(Mueller)</i>
<i>“I use leadership literature to help me in my leadership and to stay up to date”</i>	<i>(Eriksson and Fischer)</i>
<i>“I have read the book “One-Minute-Manager and attended seminars”</i>	<i>(Andersson and Danielsson)</i>

Another recurring theme during the semi-structured interviews is the personal development of leadership, which is the seventh category of expressions. Some managers stressed the importance of “learning-by-doing” whereas others said that they sometimes applied management literature and material from particular seminars in their leadership. Even though the managers differ in their expressions about how they go about improving their leadership as such, at the same time they all perceive leadership as a constant developing process.

Schneider, Johansson and Bengtssons seem to think that leadership is a changing process. Schneider argues that the most important thing to understand is that one’s leadership will always improve because of “learning by doing” and increasing experience. Fischer stresses

that one can learn technical and personal skills, but one cannot learn trust. A manager must “learn by doing” and know what one can and what one cannot. Andersson suggests that his leadership changes and improves by using his antennas. This is what some of the literature would call to use ones´ intuition, which is needed to keep a creative decision making alive. (Frenkel, 2005; Lewitt, 1991) Furthermore, in order to trust ones intuition these authors suggests the importance of self reflection in order to get to know your own strengths and weaknesses, which also seems to be the perception of Bengtsson and Weber, who express the importance of getting to know oneself. Bengtsson also argues that mistakes are one of the most important lessons to learn about yourself.

Schneider and Bengtsson perceive leadership courses and management seminars that have been offered by the company as much help for self development. Schneider argues that he learnt conflict management and Andersson and Danielsson also make use of literature and management seminars in their leadership. Fischer argues along the same line, his perception is that since nobody is a true born leader, certain management seminars could be important to up-date oneself about everything that belongs to the position so that one can improve. However, he still seems sceptical towards this method of developing leadership, as he expressed that one forgets what has been said in these seminars after two weeks. The perceptions seem to indicate that even though management seminars are of course useful in certain situations, there is most likely a difference between theory and the practical work.

Of the group of managers that do seem to find management literature necessary, Müller finds the use of management literature for certain business processes important, especially to keep oneself up to date on what’s new in the technical literature. Eriksson argued that when everything works it is easy to lead and you do not need this kind of support, but when one has to handle difficult situations, like discharging subordinates or when the subordinate does not deliver the expected performance, literature can be helpful. She perceived it as a good thing to be supported by a theory when making tough decisions, so as not to end up in a cul-de-sac, according to Eriksson. Furthermore Andersson, Fischer and Weber state that even if they currently do not read literature they have done so in the past. Seeing as they have all been managers for over ten years, this seems to indicate that literature is useful, especially for new managers.

4.6. Managers perception of leadership style

4.6.1. Situational Leadership

<i>“It takes years before one finds a leadership style to call one’s own, and this style is constantly changing and being improved”</i>	<i>(Schneider)</i>
<i>“If everything is Ok, a minimum of leadership is needed whereas when it comes to production at a higher level the importance of strong leadership comes to play a role”</i>	<i>(Becker)</i>
<i>“After a while the “One-Minute-Manager” makes sense and is very good. Leadership does have to change according to the situation”</i>	<i>(Andersson and Danielsson)</i>
<i>“I strive for teamwork, but in some situations this could even be contra productive,”</i>	<i>(Becker)</i>
<i>“The style of leadership depends on the situation and one should not generalize. Sometimes it should be team oriented and sometimes more strict”.</i>	<i>(Fischer)</i>
<i>“It is important to have a broad and not a limited competence”</i>	<i>(Weber)</i>

The next group of expressions above shows managers’ need for a situational leadership, i.e. a style that presumes that different styles are better in different situations. Their expressions and extensive use of *sometimes*, all seem to indicate that managers should be flexible enough to adapt their style to a particular situation. This goes hand in hand with leadership as a developing, changing process discussed in the previous chapter. Leadership style too, takes years and is constantly being improved and adjusted.

Since all people are different we also need different leaders. Leadership thus will have to be appropriate in terms of the situation; a leader can be good in one role within a certain context and with the same role bad in another setting. As Danielsson talks about leadership style, he argues that not all issues that affect the subordinates are related to work, i.e. a divorce or alcoholism. This can have a significant impact on the mood and performance of the person. Because of this, it is necessary that the manager also takes these kinds of problems into account when leading subordinates. He emphasises that leadership, when faced with these issues, has to change according to the situation. In those kinds of situations, he argues that a

leader should act as a kind of feedback system. If we choose to argue along the lines of Hersey & Blanchard, we interpret this as this situation requires the coaching style, S2, as presented in our theory chapter. However, this also depends on what kind of person this particular subordinate is, hence this expression we believe means that the most appropriate style depends upon subordinates improving competence together with the knowledge the manager gain through working with this subordinate. Hence, the more knowledge and competence the subordinate thereafter develops, the more tasks the manager probably delegates, thus the style will be changing and adaptable to the improving maturity level of the particular subordinate. If we compare this to Hersey & Blanchards’ situational leadership model, we interpret managers’ perceptions of their leadership to be pending mainly between the coaching and the delegating style, S2 and S4.

As noted earlier, Weber believes in teamwork and coaching; but this can naturally be contra productive in certain cases. Fischer and Becker perceive this similarly, when Fischer says that sometimes his style should be very team oriented and sometimes more strict, he probably means that it depends on the subordinates. Schmidt also argues along the same lines, that much of a leader’s work depends a lot on your personnel and how independently they are able to work. Even though these managers might not be aware of these particular models and might not consciously analyse their subordinates, they seem to be doing this subconsciously on a situational basis in order to be able to respond to their subordinates’ needs. Since both Andersson and Danielsson brought up the example of the book “One Minute Manager” by Blanchard and talked about how good this book seem to have been to them, this suggests that they are de facto aware of the Blanchard’s identified style of leadership and could possibly be applying this in their own leadership development.

4.6.2. Coaching and collegial style

<p><i>“It is better to allow subordinates to make decisions and catch them when they fall than to restrict them too much”</i></p>	<p>(Becker)</p>
<p><i>“An authoritarian leadership style is not good, since this would inhibit subordinates and create a decision vacuum when the manager retires. An authoritarian style is not</i></p>	<p>(Schneider)</p>

<i>only outdated but also not useful”</i>	
<i>“Even though my aim is not to be friends with everyone, I do get respected due to that I delegate tasks. Its negative, however, if a leader thinks that he does everything better than anyone else and micromanages”</i>	<i>(Schmidt)</i>
<i>“I am not authoritarian, I rather give subordinates clear directives but not the whole solution, I leave that up to them to figure out”</i>	<i>Fischer)</i>
<i>“Its important to be a good grandfather”</i>	<i>Mueller)</i>
<i>“Leadership is like parenthood, different subordinates need different support. Personally, I believe that people view me as a kind of helpdesk, someone they can get advice from”</i>	<i>(Eriksson)</i>
<i>“I enjoy giving and receiving feedback, to create a possibility for everyone to grow personally and believe being cooperative makes subordinates enjoy working with me”</i>	<i>(Schneider)</i>
<i>“people might think that I am a little too soft, at least compared to their former manager”</i>	<i>(Johansson and Eriksson)</i>

The ninth and last category of expressions suggests that all of our interviewees find mentioning authoritative versus collegial leadership style worthwhile. The first four perceptions clearly indicate that, first and foremost, German managers do not find an authoritative style good and all agree on the downside of an authoritative style. This group of expressions, even though expressed in slightly different ways, all seem to mean that an authoritative leader not only is outdated, but also inhibits subordinates creativity and independency. This then would also be in line with them striving to develop teams with independent subordinates as the same managers seem to have meant earlier on during our interviews. Thus it seems like these managers have a clear view and perception of how they want to act in their leadership.

Schmidt understands an authoritative style as absence of delegating tasks to subordinates and thus see this style as someone who micromanages. Becker suggests that, by allowing subordinates to make mistakes and let them learn that way instead of restricting them, he allows his subordinates freedom to make decisions and thus a more trial-and-error way of working. This seems to indicate that he, along the lines of Schmidt, neither finds it necessary

nor is useful to micromanage and thus an authoritative style in his opinion is not preferable. Mueller understands leadership in the same way by using his grandfather metaphor. We interpret this as that he sees the importance of letting subordinates act freely while at the same time backing up and supporting their personnel. This too, seems to suggest more of a collegial and coaching style. Also, this is in line with what Yukl (1998) and Irving (2005) states about the importance of the follow up and in helping out team members whilst at the same time stimulating them to work independently. Eriksson argues along the same lines as Mueller when she talks about a parental metaphor, which suggests that different people need different support and thus most probably ought to be treated differently. We believe that this coaching style is shown also in the way she thinks that people perceive her more as a helpdesk, helping out on a more individual level.

The last five expressions all suggest that the collegial style is perceived as a kind style, very team- and individual oriented where time for listening to and talking to the subordinates is viewed as very important. Schneider and also Andersson, even though differently expressed, both argue that they find it important to get to know every subordinate's needs individually, by focusing on listening, and making sure that the subordinates truly enjoy what they are doing. We find the importance our interviewees seem to put on listening to subordinates to be a very interesting finding as we noted that more than half of them mentioned this to be especially important, both in order to get subordinates to work in the same direction and perhaps more importantly to make sure that subordinates understand *why* they are carrying out certain duties. Thus, we argue that the managers understand that people's actions are based upon their understandings and meaning of why they carry out certain duties at work, which is also supported by what Sandberg & Targama call a change of doctrine – the understanding-based view on leadership. This new way of viewing leadership is based upon a perception that our reality is created by people according to previous experiences and through communication with other people, i.e. in the social context that we are living in. Our knowledge about the reality is thus socially constructed and based on our interpretation of this social context. (Sandberg&Targama, 1998). Since it all depends on a social context, there is no clear one best leadership style.

Interestingly, the collegial style also seems to have some drawbacks. At least this is how we interpret two of the Swedish managers' expressions, namely their perception of possibly even being too kind. These managers let us know during the interview that they view themselves

too soft, at least in comparison with former managers and Eriksson brought this up when comparing herself to her German counterparts. She stresses that sometimes she finds herself conducting micromanagement, i.e. delegates too little. If we choose to argue along the same lines as Kets de Vries, one possible reason to why these managers seem to feel too kind, then could be due to a personal trait of higher conflict avoidance which then results in the lack of delegation. However, we rather suggest that by viewing oneself too kind could suggest that one or two of these managers perhaps have encountered problems with their subordinates in their past. Possibly, they might have been too personal which subordinates possibly can have taken advantage of in the past.

5. Results

With our phenomenographical approach in mind, our aim has been to analyse the perceptions of leadership and simultaneously interpret what these similar and different perceptions *mean*. By analysing the similarities as well as the differences in managers' perception, we have identified a set of categories of expressions within the identified themes. We will below go through these categories one by one.

5.1 The confusion of concepts leader and manager

Our first two categories, "clear distinction" and "no distinction", show what contemporary literature also indicate; that there is much confusion about what the concepts leader and manager really means. Interestingly however, all Swedish managers except for one see a difference in the concepts, namely that a manager is the more formal of the two, something you get appointed to, whereas the leader is more informal and that is something you become.

As stated in block one, in our introduction chapter, we used the word *Leiter* to describe the word leader. However, we ran into problems with this, seeing as many of the managers seemed to wonder why we used two nouns with – to them – same meaning. Perhaps *Führer* would have been a better word to use than *Leiter*. Hence, the Germans namely did not have this clear of a perception and also often did not see any difference at all between the different terms. Thus, we believe that this could be because of the relative new use of the English expression *manager* in Germany, which possibly has little or no real meaning to the Germans.

5.2 Managers perception of cultural difference

Our third, fourth and fifth category indicates that some, but not all, do perceive that there are differences between Swedish and German leadership

For one, Germans do not have as many perceptions about their Swedish colleagues, as the Swedish counterparts have about the Germans. Swedish managers seem to perceive Germans as authoritarian and that the hierarchies are bigger there and that the decision space is smaller in Germany. Since situational variables from both internal and external environments most

likely have an impact on managers, we believe that the Swedish managers' perceptions of German bureaucracy might have to do with the fact that the German and Swedish divisions differ in size and structure. Since the larger the organisation the more bureaucratic it is likely to be, the German plant could very well be more bureaucratic compared to the Swedish one. However, the Germans do not perceive themselves this way; at least they do not talk about this.

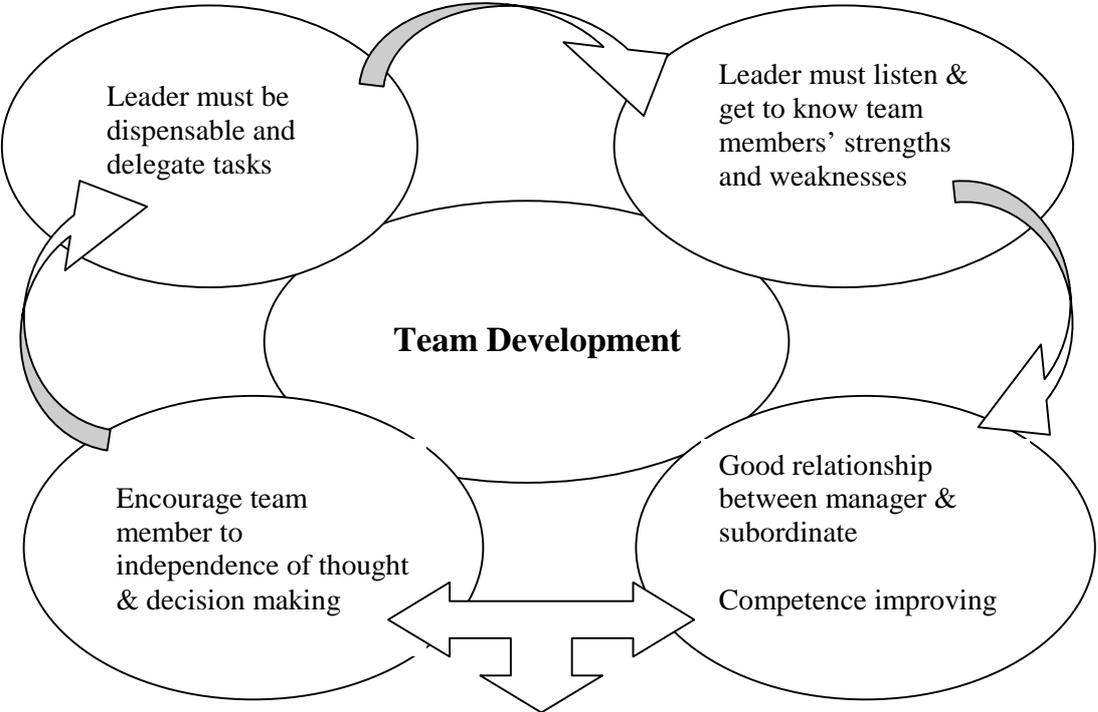
The main perception of the Germans was that they found the relationship between managers and subordinates in Sweden to be closer than in their own culture. Interestingly, both one German and two Swedes found that the decision space was bigger and that there was more room for initiative in Sweden. The way, in which the German managers spoke about this, seem to indicate that they too strive to develop a closer relationship with their subordinates. Even though the possible explanations to their perceptions could be many, again the difference in size between the factories or differences among resources and operations activities we argue is the most probable explanation.

Another interesting finding is that two of the Germans argued that they would like to be addressed informally, by the word *Du* instead of *Sie*. This we think could indicate a change in their way Germans view informality. They seem to argue, that in order to develop teams and a closer relationship with each subordinate, you need to know each other, and this would be easier through informal talk.

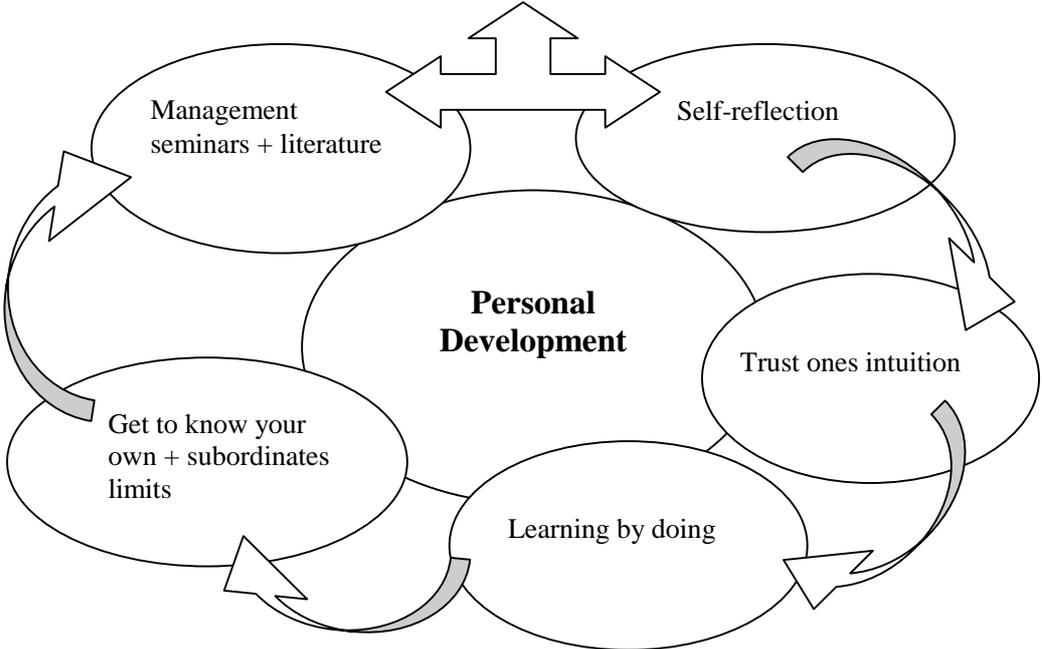
5.3 Developmental process on a team based and personal level

The sixth and seventh category, "team based" and "personal based" developmental level, show that managers perceive leadership as an ongoing developmental process on both an individual as well as on a team level. After analysing the managers' perceptions, we devised the following models, which show the leadership developmental process on each level. Like Kets de Vries who speaks about Emotional Intelligence being important in order to be a successful leader, we interpret these managers possess in their leadership too. These models show that managers own individual development and increasing competence along with the subordinates developing competence within the team ought to come together and be developed alike, through managers' Emotional Intelligence. Their perception of being collegial, kind and soft as managers we interpret as possibly being able to empathize with

others and keeping their subordinates motivated through listening to them, at the same time as they become aware of themselves in their leadership role. See models:



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



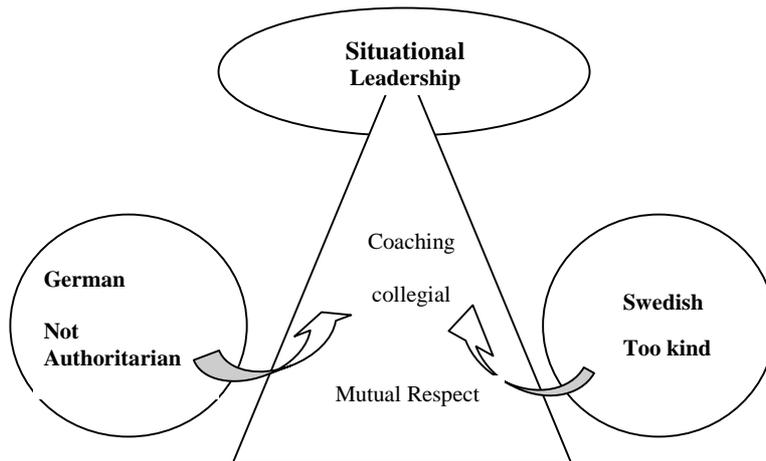
This model shows us that managers understanding of leadership is an ongoing developmental process on managers personal as well as their teams level. The core of the developmental process of leadership is managers ability to listen to and get to know their subordinates in order to improve their competence and motivate the team. Thus, a managers social skills and ability to empathise with the team is of high importance. Furthermore, along with developing the team and knowing their strengths and limits, managers suggest the importance of knowing oneself and to trust ones intuition and this can be achieved by self – reflection. Based on our findings of managers different perceptions of leadership, the results – hence this model – thus indicates that a managers’ Emotional Intelligence is the key to this developmental process.

5.4 Situational, coaching leadership style

As we have seen there seem to be different ways of expressing the same phenomenon, leadership style. As noted earlier, leadership is a learning process that is constantly developing and improving and this is why there are so many different leadership styles. Managers’ perceptions on leadership style again seem to depend upon many different aspects, such as the situation, social context, cultural background, their own self awareness as well as the competence of the subordinates. Both Swedish and German managers all seem to have adopted the situational leadership style.

Whereas some of the German managers seem to speak of the importance of not being authoritative, the Swedish managers spoke more direct of the importance of a collegial style, and two Swedes seemed to have an issue of being too kind. However, the underlying meaning in the different expressions going through the minds of the interviewed managers seem to be the understanding of the importance of being collegial and coaching rather than authoritative.

In this last model we tried to find one common denominator that is true for the perceptions of all managers, namely the situational style. The relationship between the manager and subordinate is viewed as important in order to create an informal environment, which allows for an open and sociable business environment. Interestingly, as we have seen in our previous analysis, the German managers seem to view the close manager-subordinate relationship as something their Swedish counterparts have achieved very well and strive to improve more.



6. Conclusion:

Our purpose with this thesis has been to investigate how mid-level managers within the manufacturing industry in our case study perceive leadership, and whether there exist differences in the perceptions of the Swedish and German mid-level managers of the same phenomena.

We conclude that it is a real challenge when analyzing perceptions, seeing as there are many factors which need to be taken into consideration to why one phenomenon can be understood in so many different ways. Not only is it the manager's position in the company or personal and situational aspects, but also the cultural aspect of the individual.

The interviewed managers all seem to view leadership as something positive, rewarding and inspiring. Hence, everyone seems to enjoy being a manager and conduct leadership. Furthermore, they perceive leadership as a constantly changing process, namely a developmental process not only on a personal- but also on a team level. They perceive that there is a need for a flexible style of leadership, which needs to be changing according to the business context, especially when managing across cultural borders and with different subordinates. From our interpreted perceptions we conclude that there is no such thing as the best way of conducting leadership. Every interviewed manager in this manufacturing industry, if man or woman, if Swedish or German, has to find a golden middle way which suits best for

the particular situation depending on the needs, maturity level and competence of the particular subordinate.

Their perceptions of the importance of listening, getting to know their team members strengths and weaknesses as well as reflecting upon themselves, we think suggests that they are well aware of the importance of Emotional Intelligence in today's business environment, in order to be successful in their leadership. As noted earlier, they all spoke highly about people skills and prefer the collegial and kind style rather than an authoritative style. This we believe depends on their strive for gaining respect and trust from their subordinates, so that they can stay dispensable, allowing their subordinates freedom to make decisions on their own and develop a team of independent subordinates, this by means of delegation and coaching. Their perception of a need for a coaching leadership style we conclude also has to do with today's complex business environment, especially where technological development and rapid process development belong to the everyday business environment in the manufacturing industry.

Leadership is clearly about a leader having influence over his/her subordinates, but our findings also suggest the reverse relationship, namely that the subordinates too have influence on the best suitable leadership style depending on the particular setting. In turn, the better the manager's people skills and awareness of Emotional Intelligence, the better and closer this relation. Hence, we conclude that leadership in our case study is perceived as a close relationship between managers and subordinates, and that the better the relationship between them the better the leadership.

We conclude that there are different perceptions of cultural and behavioural differences amongst our managers, but there are no main differences in the Swedish and German managers' perception of the investigated phenomenon, leadership, as such. However, we have found that there is a difference in the distinction, or absence of distinction, of the concepts leader and manager. There is also a difference in their perception of each other. As we have seen some of the Swedish mid-level managers perceive their German counterparts authoritative and caring more about hierarchies, whereas the Germans perceive themselves informal, democratic and having less of a need for hierarchies. Our interpretation of this suggests that there is a cultural difference in how to perceive these terms and how different cultures define those terms differently.

As a concluding remark, we argue along the same lines as Kets de Vries, when stating that leadership ought to be more focused on people skills, members' individual needs and Emotional Intelligence. According to our findings, we believe that there is a change in the 21. Century in how managers perceive what accounts for good leadership in these manufacturing companies. Former leadership styles seem to have had a one-way focus based on the managers needs, personality and decision making and managers seem to have acted according to the old school of management; management by fear. In our case study, these managers rather put extensive focus on Emotional Intelligence where people skills and coaching are important, a two-way focus based on not only the manager but also on subordinates is considered important in order to conduct good leadership. This change has most probably got to do with a constantly changing organizational setting into a more global and intercultural environment. More and more organizations move abroad, or merge with other firms, which is also true for our selected company. In this changing setting, cultures and people mix in today's business environment, which awakens intercultural awareness along with managers and leaders influencing each other. We believe that there is de facto a converging perception process among the managers today, considering their talk about the importance for a more informal environment and importance of people skills rather than technical skills. Thus, in our opinion this calls for a more intercultural and situational leadership style, that we also think our managers have adopted.

7. Suggestion for further research

We have carried out research about Swedish and German mid-level managers' perception of leadership within this particular manufacturing industry. However, possible future research could indeed be carried out for other countries, and perhaps include what perceptions about leadership exist in the American culture. Furthermore, more extensive research could be done with additional research methods and interview managers on different levels in the organizations.

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