LUND UNIVERSITY
Campus Helsingborg

Leadership co-construction in a Service Organization
A case study in the counter ticket offices of an Ecuadorian airline company

Author: Carlos Romero
Student ID: 840717T894
Supervisor: Mia Larson
Date: 30 May 2016

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore how leadership is co-constructed in an Ecuadorian service organization, specifically in the counter ticket offices of an airline company. Furthermore, through qualitative method, to generate an understanding of how the leadership co-construction includes different actors and factors that might be involved into this process.

This research is embedded in the theoretical field of leadership between leader and follower, providing an overview of its co-construction into an air service organization and the different leadership styles that normally emerge within the organizational structure.

As methodology, considering the exploratory strategy of this case study (Yin, 2013), seven semi-structured interviews were conducted, where different questionnaire guidelines were implemented, according to the role of the participant in the air service organization. Hence, three semi-structured interviews were held with different leaders in the role of supervisors and four semi-structured interviews were performed with coordinators and sales agents, for the collection of empirical data and its subsequent analysis. The above information, through an abductive approach as analytical reflection (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), exploring different opinions, feelings, emotions and the leader-follower relationship within these units of analysis. The gathered information was according to the different perceptions from the participants, rather than any academic knowledge.

This exploratory study offered new insights in the context of an air service organization in a developing country. The research has demonstrated the usefulness of leadership co-construction in the internal working atmosphere, associated with well-being and positive attitudes; contributing in establishing an initial step to understand its functionality in the Ecuadorian business context.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

This master thesis has been written during the second half of the spring semester 2016 at Lund University Campus Helsingborg as the final project for obtaining my degree of Master of Science (MSc) in Service Management with specialization in Tourism.

During this period of studies I have acquired knowledge and learned what it takes to be a good leader; which makes my thesis even more important to me, since is about how leadership makes people working in levels that they did not even knew.

First, I would like to express my deepest thanks to Jehovah God, for constantly blessing me and giving me the opportunity and ability to complete this thesis. Then I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Mia Larson, who guided and provided me the knowledge to develop my thesis. Also to all the interviewees, who kindly agreed to participate in this study and my girlfriend who supported me in every step.

Finally, I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude from my heart to my beloved parents and sister; for their love, help, inspiration and motivation in accomplishing this academic goal. Their support made everything easier for me, even during difficult moments. None of this would have been possible without their encouragement and sacrifice. Thank you all for believing in me and for reminding me to take it one step at a time.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

1. Introduction

This chapter provides general information concerning the leadership background into the working atmosphere of the Ecuadorian airline industry, followed by the problem discussion recognized, in order to provide the purpose of this study and the formulation of the research question.

1.1 Research background

The Ecuadorian management is performed by strict rules and procedures that normally provoke a slow decision-making process in a market that is continuously changing; especially in a globalized industry, such as the air transportation. Traditional developing countries like Ecuador possess different barriers that can affect the leadership co-construction, mainly in multinational enterprises where the organizational culture differs from these characteristics of the society.

According to Martz (1996), some common aspects in the Ecuadorian culture are *authoritarianism* and *paternalistic leadership*. Although the globalization tends to modify or evolve the societies, Latin American middle and senior managers usually remain in the traditional interaction between boss and subordinates.

Furthermore, cultural dimensions like *power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity* and *uncertainty avoidance* (Hofstede, 1980) have been developed to describe how society is established in each country and these criteria also provide an understanding about how are the roles in the Ecuadorian air service organizations. These dimensions define an Ecuadorian society where inequality exists and the less powerful members accept this belief of superiority from authoritarian managers who monitor groups of people who value an involvement relationship. This monitoring is often executed through different strict and defined procedures, with the purpose of achieving organizational success, leaving aside the people's professional development (Hofstede, 2001). Bearing in mind these particular characteristics of the Ecuadorian society, the airline industry in this country has been developed as a profit business, where all the business strategies have been focused uniquely on the revenue management and how to increase the market-share in the country. Nevertheless, in the recent years the Ecuadorian airline industry realized that it is necessary to obtain different results by implementing procedures that could propose a value flow in the service chain.

During the last years, the Ecuadorian airline market has experienced a complete change, where service is trying to become the pillar of development struggling with defined business strategies and safety procedures proper of this industry. Service marketing and management (cf. Skålén, 2010) started to be implemented, focusing in the frontline employees' attitudes and skills, to create a new way of interaction among different actors.

However, these strategies cannot be performed properly without the co-construction of the appropriate leadership to satisfy the employees' needs and create employees' engagement into the working atmosphere (Chin-Yi, 2015). The compatibility among the organizational change and leadership is fundamental for the success and survival of the firm; especially in the present work atmosphere, where all the industries are constantly fighting against different challenges for their subsistence (Burns, 2009).

This theory entails a constructivist approach (Howell, 2013), considering that its central focus is the interaction constructed by leaders and followers and how they see reality, hidden codes, power and behavior.

In this sense, there exist several characteristics that, as leader, support the motivation of the employees into the working atmosphere; such as autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It is important to have in mind that leadership characteristics are relevant for the organizational accomplishment (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Moreover, to achieve competitive advantage and profitability it is important to implement an effective leadership as part of the business strategy (Lussier & Achua, 2007). Hence, leadership has been considered an important field of study, where nowadays the organizations are allocating their resources to achieve success in their performances; having in consideration that at the present time there is a belief that the presence of active and effective leadership distinguishes the successful organizations from others less prosperous (Jones, George, & Hill, 2000).

According to the information above, all the industries are continuously evolving in a way where leadership is seen as an essential aspect of this development, giving the opportunity to enhance several characteristics included in the working atmosphere. Hence, the Ecuadorian airline industry is not an exception and evidently is taking part into this consideration. For this reason, a case study has been chosen to explore and analyze how leadership is co-constructed among different actors and factors, in the counter ticket offices of a currently operating Ecuadorian airline company.

1.2 Problem discussion

Nowadays exists a working atmosphere that is changing constantly and the organizations are facing different challenges in order to remain competitive. Nevertheless, this competitiveness must be constructed starting from the inside of the organization, working with the frontline employees, seeing them as an asset of the firm and part of the company's business strategy, since committed employees make a substantial difference into this new era of global competition (Gemmel, Van Looy, & Dierdonck, 2013).

Being the airline industry immersed in the service sector creates an overview that establishes the service as the premise of the social exchange (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). Therefore, the airline companies must have capacitated employees, devoted to the vision of the airline and service. To achieve this goal, the employees must be seen as operant resources (Lusch & Vargo, 2014), implementing techniques to develop those attributes for the benefit of the organization. Since the supervisors play an important participation in the service employees' role performance, it is relevant to take leadership into account (Gemmel, Van Looy, & Dierdonck, 2013).

Nonetheless, many studies have been realized in order to identify which leadership style should be implemented in order to create a positive working atmosphere and keep the employees motivated. Although, leadership is an aspect that could be constructed over time, it is also significant to consider that this approach goes according to the different personalities of the actors involved. Moreover, leadership not always depends on the person in charge, but also on the followers and their different personalities and behaviors; which could influence the process of leadership co-construction. Ontologically (Howell, 2013), although the followers may not be active members into leadership, they are also induced to be subject into the process.

Bass (1985) used his *full range leadership model* to work with three preferred leadership styles that are *transformational, transactional* and *laissez-faire*. However, nowadays there are other terms that have been created, but maintaining the main concepts identified by Bass, related to guidance, performance, motivation, behavior, stimulation, clarifying roles and other relevant aspects related to leadership (Gemmel, Van Looy, & Dierdonck, 2013).

The discussion goes around the numerous approaches that have been created regarding the different leadership styles and which one is more appropriate to be used. Therefore, the exploration of the leadership co-construction process gives the possibility to obtain new insights regarding this matter, in an airline service organization of a developing country such as Ecuador.

Although, leadership is far from being a new concept, most of the organizations in developing countries are still trying to comprehend how to construct the appropriate leadership, in order to keep improving the working atmosphere and evidently the performance.

The literature regarding this topic is normally focused on what is the role of a leader, what leadership style is more suitable into specific organizations, how through leadership it is possible to apply organizational changes and other different criteria considering specifically the leader into this process. However, the literature does not provide much information about how the leadership is co-constructed in Ecuadorian air service organizations, the leader-follower relationship and the role of both into this process of leadership co-construction. Hence, the aim of this study is to provide a contribution regarding the leadership co-construction and how is the interaction of leaders and followers, in an Ecuadorian air service organization.

1.3 Research purpose

The chosen case study has been taken into consideration with the purpose of exploring how leadership is co-constructed, giving an understanding of the current leadership styles applied by the different supervisors in the role of leaders of the counter ticket offices and to analyze the interaction among them and the different followers of these units of analysis. This thesis is targeted as an exploratory case study, focusing on the departments of the Ecuadorian service sector that work with frontline employees, especially airline companies.

Moreover, the aim is also to analyze the different opinions and factors that encompass the leadership co-construction and how these are affecting the working atmosphere. The latter, done through in-depth semi-structured interviews performed to employees of different hierarchies into the counter ticket offices. The identification of factors, that help to construct leadership, could suggest different possibilities to create organizational changes in order to enhance the working atmosphere. Likewise, this approach could clarify an opportunity to promote higher levels of job satisfaction, solve organizational problems and improve the level of work performance and productivity.

The practical relevance of this study implies the significance that leadership has in the modern and globalized working atmosphere, where employees face different positive or negative situations when it comes to belong to an organizational structure that applies a certain type of leadership style. This concept represents a phenomenon that is developing implications in the working daily

life, where different actors in an organization seek to obtain a healthy, productive and enriching professional experience that enables to acquire new opportunities in the labor market.

1.4 Research question

Considering the above mentioned information, it is relevant to find out what are the perceptions and factors that contribute in the leadership co-construction. Thus, how is perceived the behavior of the people playing the role of leaders in the air service organization, how the followers feel in the working atmosphere and their overall experience towards it. To achieve this purpose, the following research question was designed:

R.Q.: How do leaders and followers co-construct leadership in an Ecuadorian air service organization?

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical framework of leadership, where the study is embedded. Furthermore, it summarizes the various scopes that have been developed on previous researches regarding leadership styles, followership and leader-member exchange theory.

The development of the different sections contribute the study by giving in first place a general knowledge of the leadership theory. It provides a holistic view on how different leadership approaches stimulate the integration of the individuals and therefore the influence between each other. Besides, these concepts allow the identification of the factors included into the process that facilitate the leadership co-construction.

Moreover, since the aim of the study is how leaders and followers co-construct leadership, the next sections provide a global idea regarding different leadership styles and followership as essential criteria of this co-construction under study, specifying the qualities and different characteristics of leaders and followers; which helps to understand the individuals in this service organization chosen as case study. These theoretical backgrounds lead to the final section of this chapter, which is the leader-member exchange theory embedded in the dyadic relationship of leader and follower, giving awareness on how the quality of the interaction influences the co-construction. The concepts of this chapter create an understanding that helps to define the different categories that facilitate conducting the analysis of the collected empirical material.

2.1 Leadership

Leadership has been defined differently by several authors, according to various angles. However, most of the definitions consider leadership as a process of interaction among the members of a group, where human's actions affect each other's behavior (Bass, 1960). In this sense, leadership is performed when a person is able to change another person in the way intended; which means that "influence is the essence of leadership" (Yukl, 2013, p. 188).

More definitions have been given over the years, by understanding leadership as "the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty and cooperation", "the art of inducing others to do what one wants them to do" (Bass, 1990, p. 12). Fiedler (1995, p. 7) defines leadership as "a person who is appointed, elected or informally chosen to direct and co-ordinate the work of others in a group". Whereas DuBrin (2010) considers leadership as the

ability to motivate confidence and support to the members of a group in achieving organizational objectives.

These aspects show the emotions that emerge among leaders and followers; a characteristic that nowadays is also recognized in the leadership process (Yukl, 2013). Other definitions consider the personality of the actors involved, where leadership is seen as a combination of traits of the individuals that make accomplish tasks (Northouse, 2007).

Leadership is a relevant process in an organization, because it gives the possibility to improve and be more effective by influencing the employees' behavior. The leader comprehends the vision of the organization and establishes clear strategies that allow to plan, create change and learn from experience; by involving the people and allocating the needed resources (Carnall, 2007).

Leadership is needed at all levels of an organization (DuBrin, 2010), hence the leader is relevant to develop the role structure and direct the efficiency of the working group (Stogdill, 1974). As Stogdill (1950, p. 4) defined, leadership is "the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal-setting and goal achievement". This leader-follower interaction gives value and increases the commitment among both actors, when the leader is capable to include "enthusiasm, understanding, leadership, cooperation and trust" (Jönsson, 2005, p. 22). Despite all the definitions given by different scholars, leadership is always related to three common components that are *process* and *influence* into a group of *individuals*.

Through time the organizations have been trying to be more focused on the human side of the workers, implementing different concepts with the purpose of promoting satisfaction and fulfilment. Within this evolution, the concept of leadership arose, giving the leader a role where he or she was no longer in charge of controlling and ruling the different working activities, but to motivate and support. Leaders had to develop a different task, where they should allow the workers to participate in the personal and organizational goals.

Nonetheless, there is still a constant controversy about the difference between leadership and management. Bennis and Nanus (1985, p. 21) mentioned that "managers are people who do things right, and leaders are people who do the right things".

Managers are impersonal and focused on stability, short-term results and consistency; while leaders value innovation, flexibility, adaptation and the organizational structure where people feel motivated into favorable working conditions (DuBrin, 2010; Yukl, 2013). Kotter (1990) said that managing focuses in order, whereas leading is focused in creating organizational change.

The components in the leadership process ponder its construction among the different roles of the members and their personalities, especially within the developing countries where paradigms still give unique importance to the group leader. Communication is essential in the leadership co-construction, which integrates the different actors and processes (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010).

There are two ways of performing leadership: *direct* and *indirect*. Direct leadership influences directly the immediate followers, whereas the indirect leadership influences followers who do not have direct interaction with the leader; promotion of employees, benefits, training and professional development can be used (Yukl, 2013). Thus, normally the indirect leadership is successful when it has the contribution of the direct leadership within the organization (Yukl, 2013).

Leadership includes three general skills that are *diagnosing* the current situation to be able to understand what to expect in the future, *adapting* to adverse circumstances and *communicating* in a clear manner (Carnall, 2007). Carnall (2007, p. 154) also argues that leaders' relationship not only includes followers, but also "changing networks of people, institutions, opportunities and problems", hence he establishes five actions to be performed by the leader:

1. Set values
2. Solve problems and take risks
3. Support subordinates in taking action and decision-making process
4. Focus on the manageable
5. Develop the subordinates' skills

Leadership corresponds a process where the leader is fully immersed into the organization and its development. Nevertheless, as shown in figure 1, there are several internal and external factors that influence the leadership dynamic in the diverse domains of action and the relationship among the different actors involved. Besides, the influence is also affected by different approaches explained in the following section, which contribute in the integration of the domains, improving the leadership process and giving the opportunity to initiate an interaction that also includes the follower into the co-construction process.
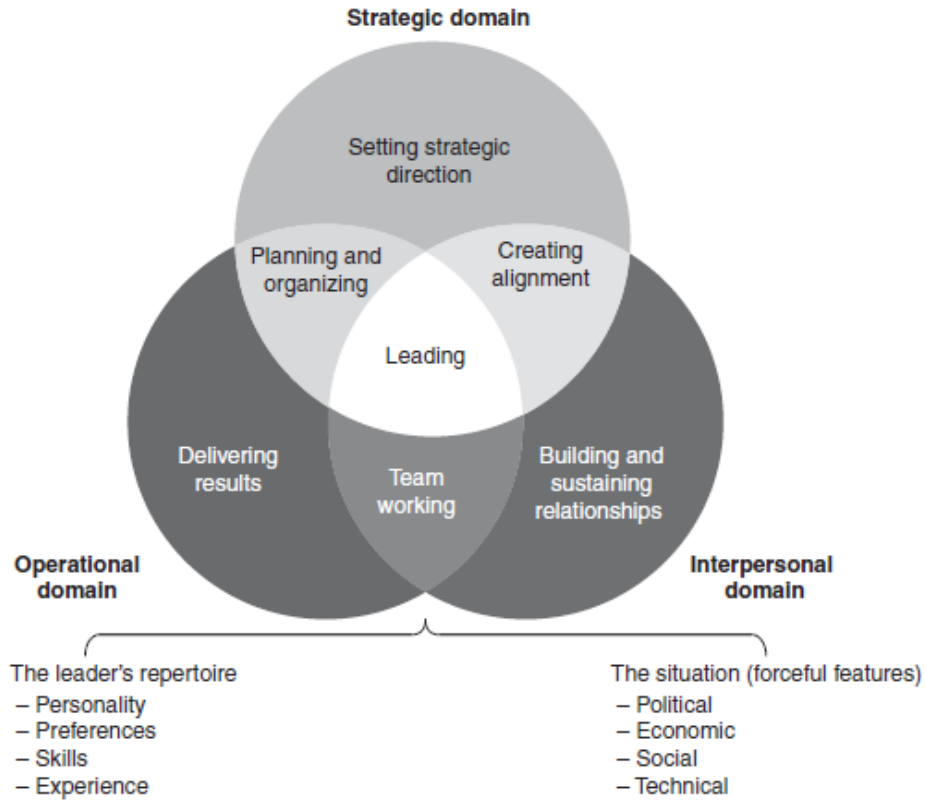
Figure 1: Influences on leadership (Pendleton & Furnham, 2011, p. 100)

2.1.1 Leadership approaches

Leadership seen as a process involves three components that are also visualized in figure 2: the *leader*, the *follower* and the *relationship* between the two previously mentioned.
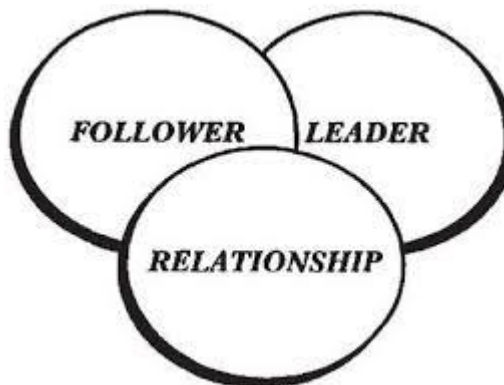

Figure 2: The Domains of Leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 221)

Considering these components, Yukl (2013) establishes five different approaches regarding leadership. The *trait approach* which is focused on the leader, implies that some individuals possess leader qualities in a natural way that other people do not have, like unlimited energy, intuition, foresight and power of persuasion; but there is no guarantee of leadership success (Yukl, 2013). The *behavior approach* focuses on the pattern of leaders' activities, responsibilities, functions and how they spend their time and cope with demands, constraints and conflicts (Yukl, 2013). Leadership as performance of behavior was defined as "the behavior of an individual while he is involved in directing group activities" (Bass, 1990, p. 14). The leader is involved into the leadership behavior performance, since he or she is permanently organizing the work relations, criticizing or praising the followers and caring of their welfare and feelings (Bass, 1990).

Power-influence approach focuses on leaders and followers, studying the influence processes between them (Yukl, 2013). It explains the effectiveness of leadership by using power to create a reaction in the follower and it also influences peers, superiors and stakeholders outside the organization (Yukl, 2013).

Situational approach focuses in the different aspects that influence the leadership process, such as characteristics of the subordinates, the nature of work, the type of the organization and the external environment (Yukl, 2013).

Integrative approach includes at least two leadership variables in one study, like for example the *self-concept theory* of *charismatic leadership*, which explains why the subordinates of some leaders decide to give an additional effort and make sacrifices in order to reach the group objective (House, 1977; Yukl, 2013).

Figure 3 provides an understanding of the variables that participate into the leadership process and their influence in the leader-follower relationship. These approaches associated to traits and behaviors are also linked to the different profiles that leaders and followers possess and share in their interaction; which is specified according to the qualities of leaders and followers that are explained in more detail in the next sections. The understanding of the different approaches and styles of leaders and followers, gives the opportunity to identify how leadership is co-constructed in this service organization.
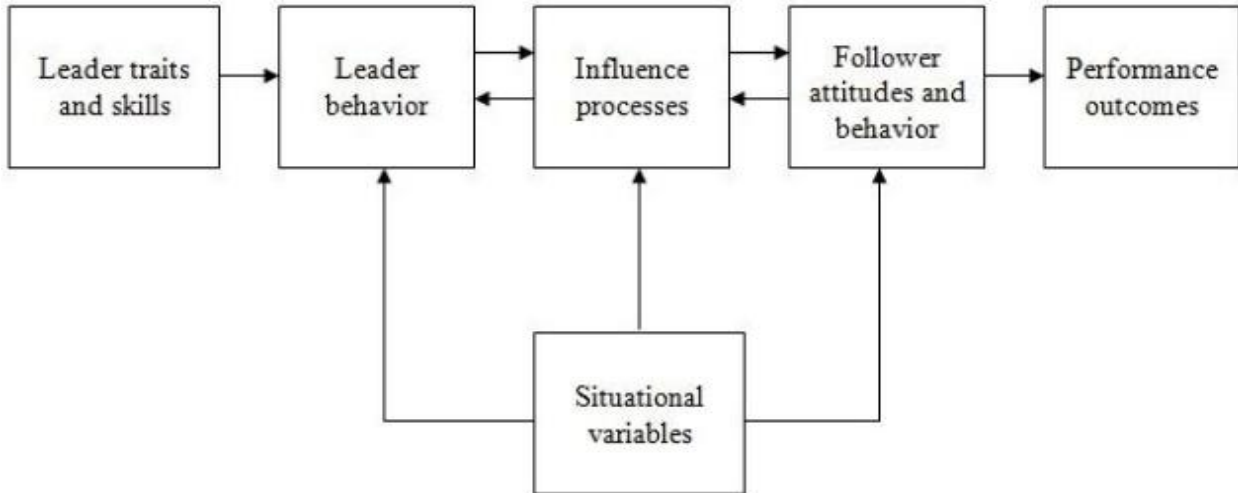
Figure 3: Causal Relationships Among the Primary Types of Leadership Variables (Yukl, 2013, p. 27)

2.2 Leadership styles

Leadership theory has been evolving with the implementation of different scholars' points of view. The manager concept changed into a leader role of motivational and supportive perspective, initiating a revolution that defined the beginning of the leadership style concept into this theory.

It is important to have in consideration that, according to different circumstances, the same leader can demonstrate behaviors that correspond to different leadership styles (Avolio & Bass, 2004). However, each leader has more of one leadership style and less of the others (Bass, 1999). Through the *full range leadership model* (Bass, 1985) three preferred leadership styles were identified and they endure until our days, called *transformational, transactional* and *laissez-faire*; which are explained below.

2.2.1 Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) is the first author who introduced the concept of *transforming leader* and he argued that it "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher level of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 382). Additionally, Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as a process instead of a behavior, where the leader encourages his or her followers to become part of a positive and profound change. The leader-follower relationship promotes deep levels of connection, commitment and performance from both parties (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leadership enhances the leader-follower relationship, increasing the maturity of the follower, the achievement desired and well-being (Bass, 1999). The hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970) inspired Burns, describing transformational leaders as someone who motivates his or her followers to go beyond their own self-interests and self-realization (Bass, 1999). In fact, this type of leader is focused on transforming the way followers think and perform their different tasks. The communication is one of the pillars in this leadership style, to provide clear knowledge of the organization, contributing in the stimulation, sense of belonging and inspiration of the followers with the purpose of achieving outcomes beyond the expectations. Moreover, the leader also develops several attitudes towards the professional development of his or her subordinates and even his or her own capacity in leading with the purpose of achieving the organizational objectives. Transformational leadership focuses in improving the followers' performance beyond expectations, creating a working atmosphere of satisfaction and commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Huczynski and Buchanan (2007) define the transformational leader as the person who shows motivation and commitment into the relationship with the subordinates and the one who influences them to perform beyond the expected, for the benefit of the organization. Consequently, the followers' efficiency is enhanced and they can be willing to face higher challenges (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Within the roles of a transformational leader are the recognition of the employees' needs and how the leader can provide to the subordinates the opportunity to develop themselves as leaders (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The transformational leader seeks to promote knowledge, commitment, autonomy, empowerment and self-monitoring among the followers. Thus, there is a genuine interest of transforming the followers from the paradigm of self-interest into the group and organizational interest (Bass, 1999). Therefore, transformational leadership focuses on appreciating and valuing followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). The progress and development of the followers is of significant importance in the transformational leadership, where the main focus is to improve the organizational performance, creating a work atmosphere of trust, loyalty and respect (Yukl, 2013).

Additionally, it is important to apply high levels of empathy and not to implement a routine in the daily interactions, but a flexible and non-automated dynamic that helps in creating a real connection among the actors (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005). Nonetheless, Bass (1998)

argued that effective leaders are both transformational and transactional, because on one hand they must be focused on commitment and on the other hand they also practice social exchange within this leader-follower relationship.

According to Allen and Meyer (1990) commitment can be *affective*, when the employees are emotionally connected to the organization; *continuance*, when the employees do not leave an organization mainly because of the perceived cost that it involves; and *normative*, when the employees feel compelled to stay in the organization. Additionally, the transformational leadership is composed by the following four components: *idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

1. *Idealized influence*: the leader is considered a role model who is admired, respected, trusted and emulated by his or her followers; where charisma is a basic characteristic to generate influence over the followers (Bass, 1985).

2. *Inspirational motivation*: the leader challenges the followers to perform high standards by encouraging them with enthusiasm and providing confidence (Yulk & Van Fleet, 1982).

3. *Intellectual stimulation*: the leader challenges the followers to become more creative in the ways of doing things, questioning implanted traditions and beliefs and make the followers active participants in solving problems proposing innovative ideas (Bass, 1985; Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Benson, 2003).

4. *Individualized consideration*: the leader considers the individual needs of followers and creates support to them (Winkler, 2009). The relationship is strong among each other and the leader behaves as coach and mentor towards the followers (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Benson, 2003).

Figure 4 shows the components included within the transformational and transactional leadership and what are the expectations according to the implemented leadership style.
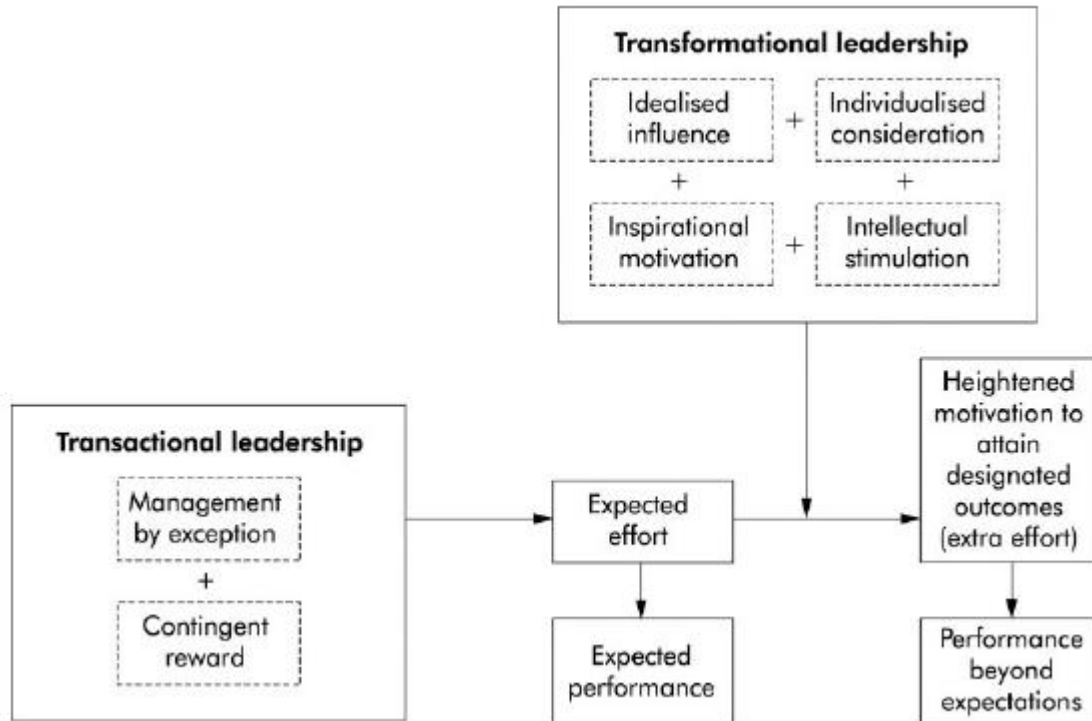
Figure 4: The Augmentation Model of Transactional and Transformational Leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p. 21)

2.2.2 Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership is based on an exchange leader-follower relationship, where both focus on their individual benefits (Winkler, 2009). The transactional leader gives the followers what they require, in return for what the leader expects (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2007). The followers accomplish the leader's requirements in exchange of rewards or to avoid punishment for not meeting the standard performance (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Benson, 2003). Therefore, transactional leadership is focused on achieving the specific organizational goals (Aarons, 2006).

Personal development is not an essential criteria in the transactional leadership, but the accomplishment of the defined goals (Northouse, 2007). The leader is responsible of clarifying the tasks by using power as a medium of influence (Burns, 1978; Avery, 2004; Bass, 1985). The followers' fulfilment has as purpose the obtention of rewards offered by the leader and Yukl (2013) argued that there is no real commitment among the followers.

According to Avolio and Bass (2004) the transactional leadership is composed by three components: *contingent reward, active management by exception* and *passive management by exception*.

1. *Contingent reward*: is an agreement where the leader establishes the objectives and the performance that he or she expects from the followers, clarifying the rewards to be offered (Bass, 1985; Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Benson, 2003).

2. *Active management by exception*: the leader monitors the execution of tasks to find problems, solve them and reinforce procedures (Gill, 2006).

3. *Passive management by exception*: leaders behave in a reactive manner, waiting for problems to occur to take action over them (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The followers work freely and the leader takes action when mistakes arise (Gill, 2006).

<u>2.2.3 Laissez-faire leadership</u>

It possesses an absence of leadership or the avoidance of it, where he or she does not take responsibilities, make decisions or provide support to the followers (Winkler, 2009). The leader has a passive role with breve or null interaction with the followers (Sadler, 2003).

The leader is not involved with the followers and they do not have real knowledge of their problems (Yukl, 2013), provoking a lack of growth in the followers' development (Northouse, 2007). Communication, commitment, feedback, involvement and rewards are not part of this leadership style (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

Once have been provided the characteristics of the leader within this co-construction, the following section goes more in detail with the follower of this interaction.

2.3 Followership

Followers play a crucial role into the leadership process, because leaders would not exist without the followers and at a certain point the leaders also perform a follower role within an organization (Yukl, 2013; DuBrin, 2010). Consequently, during the last years several scholars have been focusing into this followership concept.

According to Howell and Costley (2006) followership is a complement of leadership to achieve the goals of the organization. The followers cooperate in the organizational success and they are able to colaborate in the improvement of the organizational well-being (Kelley, 1992).

Riggio, Chaleff and Blumen-Lipman (2008) defined followership as the ability of a person to follow a leader, whereas Yoder-Wise (2011, p. 6) defined followership as the "engaging with others who are leading or managing by contributing to problem identification, completing tasks,

and providing feedback for evaluation". Considering the relevance of the followers' participation in the organizational dynamic, their satisfaction creates a vital process in the organizational success (Trottier, Van Wart, & Wang, 2008).

The leader-follower relationship is based in a social constructivist theory which highlights that "leadership is significantly affected by the way followers' construction and representation of their leaders'" (Sinha, 2012, p. 41). Hence, followers' personalities and behaviors are capable to mutually contribute and build the leadership process and modify the leadership style of the person who is leading the group. Nevertheless, followers do not feel confident in the leader-follower relationship when there is a lack of cooperation and involvement from the leader (Barnard, 1938).

Kelley (1992) defined four essential qualities for effective followers: *self-management, commitment, competence and focus* and *courage*.

1. *Self-management*: refers to the followers' capacity of working with autonomy without close supervision; being capable to perform themselves as leaders (DuBrin, 2010; Everett, 2016).
2. *Commitment*: the degree to which the follower feels a sense of belonging towards the vision and goals of the organization and group (DuBrin, 2010; Everett, 2016).
3. *Competence and focus*: the followers' ability on mastering skills and aptitudes that are useful to achieve the organizational goals. These subordinates possess the capacity and willingness to cooperate in different tasks (DuBrin, 2010; Everett, 2016).
4. *Courage*: the followers' distinguished characteristic of fighting for what they believe is a right cause. They possess high ethical standards which make them face dishonest situations within the organization or group (DuBrin, 2010; Everett, 2016).

Hayes, Caldwell, Licona and Meyer (2015) identified several conditions performed by the leaders that interfere the creation of followership:

1. Low investment in the human resource
2. Treating followers only as means to accomplish goals
3. Staying satisfied in the zone of comfort with the results instead of achieving higher performance
4. Being focused in the short-term performance and results
5. Relying on mere evaluations and not on coaching the employees
6. Lack of empowerment
7. Breaking agreements and commitments

8. Giving value to situations that are not priority for the organization

According to the different dimensions and qualities that the followers possess, it is relevant to provide general understanding about the different types of followers, since this aspect has a significant consideration in the interaction between the follower and the leader in the co-construction process.

2.3.1 Types of followers

Each follower is an individual with different characteristics that are brought within the group and organization. The leader's challenge is to recognize them according to the degree of motivation and talent of each subordinate (DuBrin, 2010).

Kellerman (2007) defined different types of followers in accordance to their degree of engagement with the leader or group, they are: *isolates, bystanders, participants, activists* and *diehards*.

1. *Isolates*: do not involve themselves into the group and avoid the creation of a relationship with his or her leader (DuBrin, 2010).

2. *Bystanders*: care about their self-interest and have low motivation (DuBrin, 2010).

3. *Participants*: are the followers that show a certain level of engagement into the group or organization, willing to learn and help the group (DuBrin, 2010).

4. *Activists*: are engaged and willing to show their support or disapproval to the leader or organization (DuBrin, 2010).

5. *Diehards*: are fully engaged, to the point that they can provoke the expulsion of the leader if the follower feels that he or she is not achieving the organizational goals (DuBrin, 2010).

After providing the different characteristics of leadership and followership, as well as the most relevant qualities of these individuals; the next step is to understand how these concepts contribute together in the relationship among leader and follower, in order to understand the creation of leadership co-construction. Hence, the following section provides information regarding the leader-member exchange theory; which is concentrated specifically in the relationship between leader and follower.

2.4 Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX)

Leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) focuses on the dyadic relationship between the leader and every single follower (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015; Winkler, 2009). This theory explains the influence upon each other, which contributes in negotiating the role of the follower in the organization and this relationship can vary between *high-exchange* and *low-exchange* (Yukl, 2013). This research is based on this dyadic process, where the study has the aim to explore how leadership is co-constructed in an Ecuadorian air service organization and understand how leaders and followers influence each other.

Members of a group become part of high-exchange or low-exchange depending on the relationship with the leader, where personality and any other personal characteristics are crucial, because it influences the behavior and attitude of the participants into this process (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Social exchange is the base for leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

High-exchange is fostered by a relationship where the leader seeks the follower's promotion, diversification of attractive tasks, assignment of different responsibilities, implementation of empowerment, involvement, benefits and open communication; in return the follower normally becomes loyal to the leader, works with proactivity and provides initiatives into the continuous improvement processes (Yukl, 2013). The premise of this relationship is trust and mutual obligation, where even affection could be developed (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015). However, usually it is challenging for the leader to maintain this standard, since it implies time-consuming and constant attention to the followers' needs and feelings (Yukl, 2013).

Low-exchange normally implies a less mutual relationship, where the followers are focused uniquely on their specific tasks and in return they receive the regular benefits defined by the organization (Yukl, 2013). The economic exchange is the fundament of the relationship (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015). On one hand, this theory shows that followers follow because they receive something from the leader; on the other hand, leaders lead according to what they get from the followers (Messick, 2004).

Regarding the followers, the leader-member exchange is perceived as positive when the work atmosphere feels fair and supportive from the leader's side. Likewise, from the leader's point of view, the leader-member exchange is influenced according to the follower's competence and

dependability (Yukl, 2013). "Effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring" (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 225).

According to Yukl (1989), the leader-member exchange was related to a transactional leadership style because of its focus on reward exchange, but this was examined by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) who reframed the theory into a transactional and transformational process. At the beginning the leader-member exchange theory is defined as transactional, but afterwards the relationship develops trust, loyalty and respect; hence it becomes transformational (Bass, 1999).

The quality of this dyadic relationship influences the behavior of the subordinates, improving the job satisfaction, commitment and performance (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Therefore, this leadership relationship is of significant relevance to the organization, to improve its efficiency through a high quality team work (Choy, McCormack, & Djurkovic, 2016).

Leader-member exchange establishes not only an influence as a leader, but also a variety of factors that enhance synergy among the actors and can promote the beginning of a leadership co-construction, through this leader-follower relationship. Nevertheless, even though this theory is embedded into the leader-follower relationship, it mentions how the interaction helps the leader to influence over the follower, rather than also providing information concerning on how the followers can influence the leadership style of the person leading.

Over the years leadership has been considered as a top-down process (Bedeian & Hunt, 2006) but nowadays it is increasingly described as a social construction among leaders and followers, where each one influences over the other (Bass & Bass, 2008). Dienesch and Liden (1986) created a model that explains the development of the leader-member exchange theory. This model, shown in figure 5, includes the leader and member characteristics that influence the interaction between both and, consequently, the quality of the relationship. Epitropaki and Martin (2005) argue that the leader-member exchange theory possess a higher quality when the characteristics of both parties are compatible.

This model gives a relevant importance to the initial interaction, where the encounter provides a first impression of each other and then the relation starts to be developed. Nonetheless, according to different stereotypes and judgements, the initial interaction can be affected provoking an effect in the quality of the relationship. This situation can cause the disappearance of the attribution phase into this process (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).
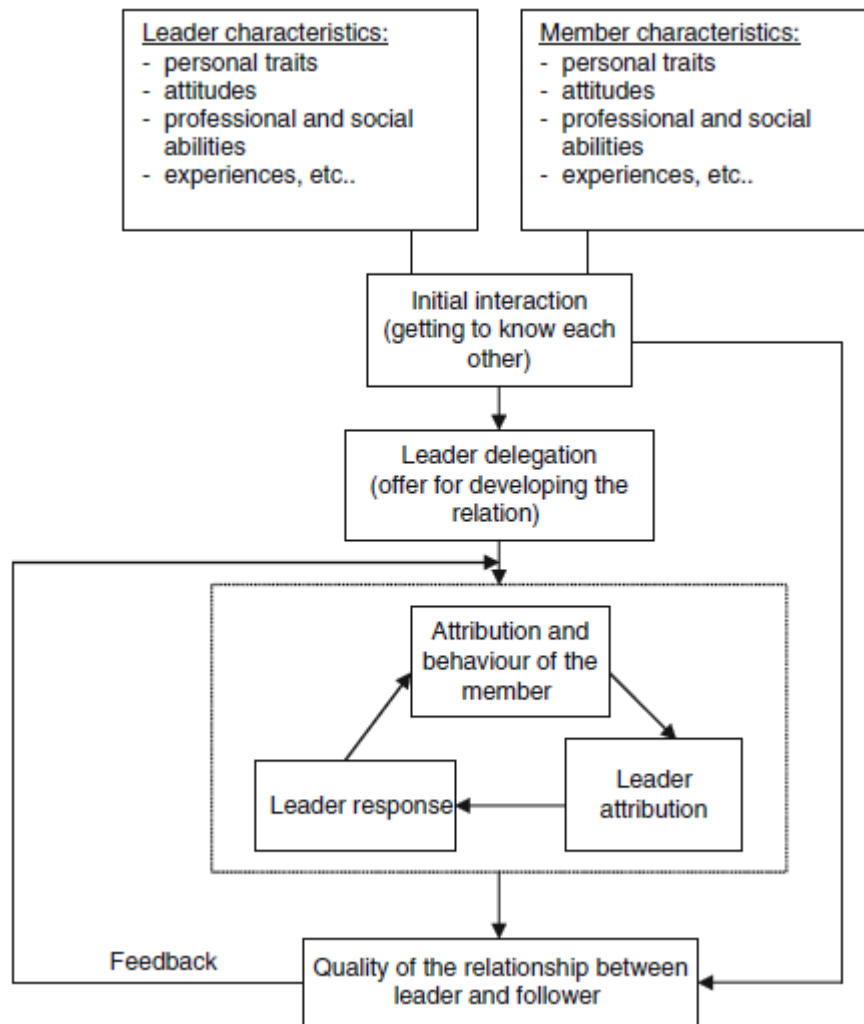
Figure 5: Leader-member exchange theory development process (Dienesch & Liden, 1986, p. 627)

High quality decision-making is essential into an organization desiring to obtain competitive advantage, but it must foster a participative decision-making among all its members (Vroom & Jago, 1988). Leadership is about decision-making, change of mentality, adaptability, evolution as organization and influence over other individuals; therefore, it represents a constructivist approach through a social interaction of exchange.

Leadership theory includes several stages, the first stage involves the creation of the vertical dyadic linkages, where leaders evolve different relationships with every single subordinate and its purpose is to have trusted assistants (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009). The second stage is focused on the effects of the connections into the relationship and its outcomes, putting the aim

on the development of the leader-member exchange relationships and the different behaviors of the leader and follower that affect the process (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009).

The third stage is concentrated in studying leadership as partnership between leaders and followers. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) developed three phases of building a relationship that are also shown in figure 6. Some relations only remain in the first phase which belongs to the transactional leadership. In this phase the leader-follower relationship establishes mutual role expectations, where both parties only perform their specific roles within a low-exchange relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009). In the second phase the relationship starts to be developed between the leader and the follower and within this phase the follower begins to acquire access to more information, takes more responsibility, trust, respect and commitment appear (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009). The third and final phase is normally reached by few relationships, where mutual commitment and trust are essential for the benefit of the group and not the accomplishment of self-interest, in this phase the roles show a high-exchange relationship that corresponds to a transformational leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009).
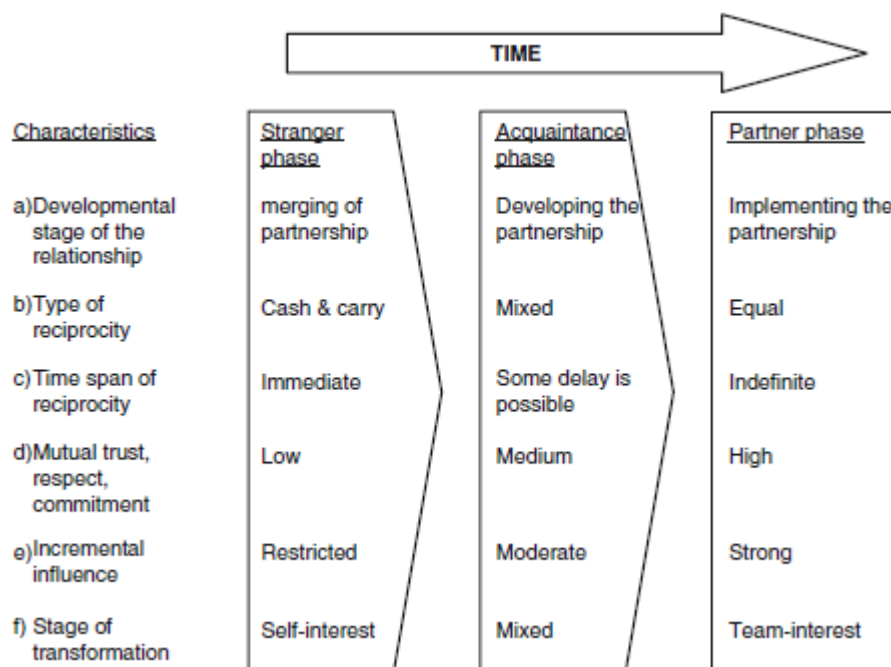
Figure 6: Life Circle of Leadership Making (Winkler, 2009, p. 52)

The fourth stage aims to expand leader-member exchange theory to groups and networks, to create larger systems (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009).

Concerning this leader-member exchange theory, several authors propose different factors that might influence the quality of the leader-follower relationship, hence they can also provide important outcomes within this study of leadership co-construction. These factors are the level of trust among leader and follower (Liden & Graen, 1980), the competence of the follower (Liden & Graen, 1980), the degree of leader-follower loyalty (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), the level of perceived harmony in the relationship (Hollander, 1980), the degree of reciprocity (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997), the level of reciprocal influence (Yukl, 1994) and the extent of interpersonal atraction (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975).

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter started with a general overview regarding different theories that have been created in accordance to leadership. It has been mentioned that influence is critical into the process (Yukl, 2013), with the purpose of motivating confidence and support among the members of a group in order to modify behaviors and achieve organizational goals (Bass, 1960; DuBrin, 2010).

The co-construction is created by the leader and follower, for this reason it has been necessary to provide general theoretical backgrounds about these individuals that conform the essence of the interaction and are fundamental for the purpose of this study and the research question. The influence between leader and follower is performed according to their personalities, skills, experience and different qualities that orient each individual into a specific profile or style of being a leader or a follower, which is crucial for the initial interaction and co-construction of leadership (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

Although the leader has the responsibility of establishing the first contact with the follower, in order to promote a relationship of high quality, the theoretical framework also gives the understanding on how the followers play an important role and are even able to contribute in the influence process, which is explained in the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). The different stages of this theory are focused on the dyadic relationship between the leader and every single follower, seeing it as a partnership among both individuals (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015; Winkler, 2009). The different profiles of leaders and followers provided in the first sections of this chapter are linked with the knowledge given by the leader-member exchange

theory, giving an overarching understanding about how the interaction matures according to the compatibility of the different characteristics that these individuals propose as part of the leadership co-construction (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005).

The knowledge obtained from the theoretical framework helps to clarify the research design to be implemented, where the purpose is to understand qualitatively how these individuals co-construct leadership in this Ecuadorian air service organization. Moreover, it contributes to identify the most appropiate research method to be used and to delimit the guide of reference in order to conduct the process of gathering the empirical material; aspects that are explained in detail in the following chapter.

3. Method

This chapter discusses the method applied for fieldwork, where a qualitative research was defined to gather the required information from the group of interest. This study on the leadership co-construction in an Ecuadorian service organization is embedded in the exploration of leader-follower relationship, perception and emotion; where according to Silverman (2013), the qualitative research is more suitable for this kind of study.

Furthermore, the research question is designed using meaning and emotion, which is related to a qualitative research, having in consideration that this approach is mostly used when the intended study cannot be measured in numbers and the purpose is to get profound knowledge of a specific phenomenon. Additionally, it is relevant to bear in mind that "the quality concept in qualitative study has the purpose of *generating understanding*" (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551), for this reason this kind of study is more suitable when examining a particular aspect of social life (May, 2011). These characteristics established in the research question lead the study to the epistemological stance of constructivism, where leadership is socially constructed by the leader-follower relationship (Bass & Bass, 2008).

Social constructivism (Burr, 1995) provides an understanding on how the individuals influence on each other within the leadership co-construction. Therefore, this epistemological stance is appropriate for the purpose of this research in an attempt to explore and analyze the individuals' perceptions and what is the meaning that they impose into this process.

3.1 Research approach

The researcher has the possibility to choose among different approaches, when the study includes theory and empirical data (Bryman, 2012). The first approach is deduction which comes from existing theories and uses empirical data to test or refute them (May, 2011), the second approach is induction which aims to formulate theory from the empirical data previously collected (May, 2011) and the third approach is abduction which is used in many case study researches to generate understanding by constantly moving from the analysis of the empirical data to the theoretical framework in order to modify or adjust it according to the information obtained from the gathered information (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Due to the aim of this study the abductive approach was chosen as theoretical reflection (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Although, leadership is far from being a new theory and many

scholars have raised definitions regarding this concept, there is no much contribution about the leadership co-construction in an Ecuadorian service organization. However, in the core of this study several universal theories have been taken into consideration to mutually complement the empirical data.

The combined analysis of empirical data and framework, facilitated by the abductive approach, contributes in the proposal of new theoretical ideas, where the understanding is the essence for formulating explanations of a particular phenomenon (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Consequently, the interpretation of the empirical material was done through a hermeneutic approach, which is more appropriate when the aim is to generate understanding of human behavior (Bryman, 2012).

3.2 Research design

Regarding the research design, is relevant to consider that it turns the research questions into a research project to be developed and it defines the guidelines that help getting the answers to reach the aim of the study. The main focus was to choose a topic of social importance that at the same time could be explored and analyzed for academic purposes, applying a qualitative research into the study. In this regard, Silverman (2013) argues that the researcher should begin in a familiar territory, which it was made.

Once the topic of study was chosen, the next step was to define a specific aim, by narrowing down the topic (Silverman, 2013). In order to reach this goal, it was designed the research question capable to organize, direct, give coherence, delimit the research and keep the researcher focused (Silverman, 2013) into the aim defined in the study research. In this sense the struggle about which leadership style is more appropriate in order to have motivated and committed employees was selected as the problem discussion of this research, where the units of analysis are the counter ticket offices of an anonymous Ecuadorian airline company.

As methodology, this research corresponds an exploratory case study (Yin, 2013) which basically aims to explore how through social constructivism, leaders and followers mutually build a leadership process within this air service organization, chosen as case study. This scope of exploratory methodology helps to acquire insights about this particular phenomenon under study and through qualitative research method to generate profound understanding of the relationship and influence that leaders and followers have on each other.

Thus, the case study research provides the opportunity to explore in detail different aspects and their relation among each other within one same context, obtaining a holistic view of the research study (Gummesson, 2000). Moreover, Yin (2003, p. 41) argues that a case study based on a representative case is "a useful tool to capture the circumstances and conditions of everyday or commonplace situations".

Likewise, in this research it was implemented the grounded theory design that fosters an iterative method where the researcher is able to move constantly among the collected data and theory; which helps designing the theoretical framework as well as applying the coding tool at the moment of analyzing the empirical data (Bryman, 2012). In addition, the grounded theory helps narrowing down the theories and leaving the information that is not necessary to answer the research question; insofar as the researcher is in advance familiarized with the research, the gathered data will make sense in the study (Bryman, 2012).

3.2.1 Data collection process

This research is embedded into the human interaction between leaders and followers and how they influence each other for the co-construction of this process in an Ecuadorian service organization. In this sense, as previously mentioned, an abductive approach was applied to analyze the collected empirical material according to the theories included in the theoretical framework; which together help to design the research question that reaches the aim of the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In addition, due to the lack of sufficient information regarding the leadership co-construction in an Ecuadorian airline company, which is the service organization under study; an exploratory case study was chosen to be developed.

In a research study is necessary to have in mind the most adequate method to acquire clear or relevant data (Silverman, 2013). According to Yin (2003), interviews are one of the most relevant sources of information in a case study research, because they provide deep insights of the topic under study (Bryman, 2012). In this regard, in-depth semi-structured interviews were defined as the method to be used for the data collection of this topic. The purpose was to explore the opinions, emotions and perceptions of the participants, for which the semi-structured interviews are more suitable (Silverman, 2013).

Using in-depth semi-structured interviews the interviewer has the opportunity to go beyond the question and reach further information from the interviewee, which might be relevant for the

findings (May, 2011). This type of interview gives the possibility to create a dialogue among the researcher and participant, which could enrich the information provided and the construction of different arguments. Moreover, the semi-structured interview involves the participant into an exchange process (May, 2011).

Although unstructured interviews are considered to be more suitable when the aim is related to feelings and emotions; the purpose was also to get feedback about the opinions and perceptions of the interviewees to get a general understanding regarding this study, exploring any identifiable social pattern throughout the different interviews. Hence, as previously mentioned, only semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research. Furthermore, it was useful to have a framework to develop as a schema during the interview to keep focus on the aim of the study; which also allows to clarify or explain any further information to the interviewee.

Concerning the mentioned framework, two different interview questionnaires were created (please see appendices A and B), asking about general background, opinions, feelings and perceptions. The interview questionnaires were created differently, according to the role of the participants within this anonymous Ecuadorian airline company under study. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with different leaders in the role of supervisors, including eleven questions; whereas four semi-structured interviews were performed with different followers in the role of coordinators and sales agents, including fifteen questions.

It is important to remark that the questionnaire helped as a guideline to conduct the semi-structured interviews and expand the knowledge not only about the specific questions designed, but also to go in-depth as a dialogue regarding the different relevant aspects identified in the theoretical framework, which provide an understanding about the leadership co-construction in this Ecuadorian service organization. The first three questions of both interview guides are related to the perception of leadership in the organization as a whole and to understand what are the factors and approaches from the theoretical framework that are identified by the leaders and followers of this airline company. In addition, during the conduction of the interviews some participants mentioned different aspects that afterwards were also included in the theoretical framework, like for example the direct or indirect way of performing leadership by the participants (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2013).

Other questions ask about the leader-follower relationship, the identification of leadership co-construction, perceived characteristics of the different employees into this process and the

emotions that denote the type of connection and compatibility among the individuals (Kelley, 1992; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Kellerman, 2007; Winkler, 2009). These aspects are connected to the leader-member exchange theory mentioned in the theoretical framework, where the focus is on the contribution of leader and follower and the importance of the initial interaction; providing an understanding about the dyadic relationship and the different individuals' qualities that are perceived in the interaction and how their skills, experiences and personalities enrich the compatibility of leaders and followers (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

Additionally, the questionnaire also includes the level of involvement and influence (Barnard, 1938; Bass, 1985; Yukl, 2013) perceived by the participants in their different roles of leaders and followers. These aspects provide understanding in regard of the *life cycle leadership making* (Winkler, 2009) described in figure 7, as part of the transition that the dyadic relationship possesses in order to co-construct leadership.

The seven participants were contacted in advance considering specific characteristics among them within the leadership process. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the structure of the interview, estimated length of the interview and they were asked for permission to audio-record the entire interview to ensure the accuracy of the data obtained; for which all the participants agreed voluntarily. According to Yin (2003, p. 93) "audiotapes certainly provide a more accurate rendition of any interview than any other method". Moreover, the participants were also informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews for this study.

All the interviews were virtually conducted through Skype, setting in advance with each participant the day and time; having in consideration the time zone difference between Sweden and Ecuador. In average, the interviews lasted fifty six minutes and they were held in Spanish.

Additionally, it is important to have in consideration that a pilot interview was conducted with a participant that performed both roles, once the questionnaires were made. The pilot study gave the opportunity to obtain empirical knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of the previous interview questionnaires. Having this real perspective from an external point of view made it possible to make some improvements to the questionnaires and to give the research the desired approach. Besides, the pilot interview was truly beneficial for the research purpose, considering that it actually provided an enrichment criteria not only to the questions designed, but also to understand how to conduct the overall interview and how to go deep into each specific question

through the interview questionnaires. Hence, throughout the interviews further questions were asked related to the questionnaire, to acquire more information about specific insights that might be of great importance for the findings. In addition, the participants provided more information besides the ones included in the questionnaires, which originated even more and new questions included into the study.

3.2.2 Sampling methodology

Considering that the aim of the study is to explore how leadership is co-constructed in an Ecuadorian air service organization; a purposive sampling was established, having in consideration that the selection of the participants was made according to a known characteristic of leader and follower within an Ecuadorian air service organization (May, 2011).

An anonymous airline company from Ecuador was chosen into this case study research, which operates in several countries of Latin America and also countries from other regions. This airline company was selected because they are still growing and gaining presence within this air transportation industry by implementing advanced technology and service culture training among its employees. However, this air service organization is still struggling with the interaction of leaders and followers, where the culture of developing countries seems to be an obstacle to foster a thriving leadership co-construction. Once the service organization was identified, the next step was to be focused in a department or unit of analysis where a permanent interaction among leaders and followers exists and that might experience difficulties in the leadership co-construction. In this sense, the counter ticket offices were selected; conformed by sales agents, coordinators and supervisors. Lately, this air service organization has been modifying the supervisors of these units of analysis, sometimes creating nuisance among the sales agents and coordinators.

Three counter ticket offices are part of this case study, all of them located in Guayaquil - Ecuador, one in the airport and the other two in downtown. Although the interaction with passengers is different among these units of analysis, they all share the same organizational structure. The counter ticket offices provide face-to-face customer service and the main purpose is to sale airline tickets, provide flight information, request special services and give assistance concerning the frequent flyer program of the airline company under study.

Concerning the participants (please see appendix C), the sales agents act as followers and they report directly to the coordinator and the supervisor. They are in direct and constant contact with

customers and their role is to elaborate airline reservations, confirm bookings, sale air services offered by the company and provide any further assistance required by the customers.

The coordinators have a shared role regarding the leadership co-construction, since they are leaders according to the sales agents and followers of the supervisors. Their main role is to control the operational tasks of the counter ticket offices regarding group goals, schedules, performance of the sales agents and they provide support to the supervisors in their different activities. Occasionally the coordinators have direct contact with the customers, in order to assist in situations that are not under the control of the sales agents.

The supervisors are the leaders of the sales agents and coordinators and report directly to the middle manager of the department, with whom they serve as followers. In general terms they are focused on the administrative tasks, so they are in charge of the monthly statistics, income and budget of the counter ticket office where they work. They are not in direct contact with the customers, with the exception of critical situations where they take control, in order to provide efficient solutions. It is also important to remark that to become a supervisor, they must start in the organization as sales agents and then they get promoted to the coordinator position. Therefore, the supervisors have general knowledge of the systems, procedures, operational and administrative tasks of these units of analysis.

Due to the limited time frame, seven participants in the role of leaders or followers were chosen to be part in this study. Although many other employees could also take part into this research, it was not possible to select all of them, even though they share common characteristics (Malhotra, 2010). All the participants work in this airline company for five years or more, their age is between 30 and 36 years old and they have different educational backgrounds. On one hand the common factor that they know each other and work for several years within the same air service organization and on the other hand the diversity that they provide to the company gives the possibility to obtain relevant findings regarding the leadership co-construction. Bearing in mind these aspects further follow-up questions were asked, in order to acquire as much relevant data as possible and a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

3.2.3 Data analysis

The chosen method of analysis must be structured and coherent, in order to obtain findings that can answer the designed research question. In this sense, the data collected from qualitative

research is normally rich and detailed according to the phenomenon under study. Nevertheless, this strength could also create an inconvenient, since the gathered data might be difficult to process into an analysis.

The process of analysis must be done meticulously because the findings are usually suspected of influence, creating bias in the researcher's interpretation. Hence, the empirical data must be simplified by the researcher, coding the acquired information from the participants. First of all, the researcher must be familiarized with the data collected and be able to relate it with the developed theoretical framework, which helps to implement a proper coding as established in the grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Being familiar with the definitions, words and phrases related to the concepts from the theoretical framework ensures the consistency of the coding process.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and afterwards they were continuously transcribed after each interview, applying a hermeneutic approach to understand and interpret the data within the intended context (Bryman, 2012). According to Yin (2003) it is important to identify significant statements, even rival interpretations and the most relevant features of the case study.

Each transcription was done anonymously and in the original language of the interview (Spanish). The transcriptions were read carefully in order to identify important statements that were highlighted, collected in the same order that were mentioned during the interview and translated into English; in this sense the research question and theoretical framework provided guidance to determine key variables. Then the highlighted statements were analyzed with the purpose of creating codes where the expressions were classified.

The coding process was done in an iterative manner after the transcription of the interviews and it was based on patterns identified from the answers of the different participants, related with the theoretical framework. The examined empirical data were grouped according to their similar characteristics, in order to identify categories to be developed in the analysis chapter. According to the frequencies from the data, the following codes were defined and abbreviated to facilitate the analysis: direct leadership (DL), indirect leadership (IL), idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), individualized consideration (IC), contingent reward (CR), active management by exception (AMBE), passive management by exception (PMBE), profile (PR), self-management (SM), commitment (CO), competence and focus (CF), courage

(COU), leader-member exchange theory (LMX), influence (INF), involvement (INV) and communication (CMM).

Once the data were classified into coding according to the patterns obtained from the empirical material, these were analyzed with the theories; as part of the abductive approach process that enables to analyze in a continuous interplay among theory and data. In this step it was discovered links between data and theories that provided higher relevance to each other and helped defining the different categories. The coding process was reviewed, since some classifications were not completely accurate from the beginning. Then it was realized that some groups had similar data, which helped to condensed the information and create categories that encompass various classifications. Hence, it was used an axial coding that refers to "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). The analysis was concluded with the following six main categories that were defined by connecting the empirical material, coding and concepts from the theoretical framework:

- Leadership in the air service organization
- Factors contributing in the leadership co-construction
- Leader-follower involvement
- Leader-follower relationship
- Leader's influence
- Leader's profile

These categories are developed in detail in the Analysis of chapter 4, to explain the findings of this study. The implementation of this process facilitated the researcher's identification of different variables included in the interviews.

3.3 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research studies four quality criteria should be considered in order to gain trustworthiness of the study and these are: *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability* (Bryman, 2012). These criteria are of great relevance to help establishing the foundations of the research structure.

Credibility refers to the extent on which the findings can be credible or believed and it could be done by reporting the results to the participants that have been interviewed, with the purpose of

receiving feedback that might be relevant or confirm the researcher's interpretations (Bryman, 2012). In this sense, each participant has received the transcription and the important statements of their own interviews, before showing the findings in the research. Doing this procedure the study reaches a higher level of credibility, since the case study includes the interpretation of the researcher and the perception of the participant who is being considered as a member of this leadership co-construction under study.

Transferability refers to the possibility of transferring the results of the research to another context (Bryman, 2012). Being aware that this research has been developed with an abductive approach and a sample of seven participants, it might be insufficient to consider transferability. This research is an exploratory case study (Yin, 2013) which aims to generate understanding about a specific context (Stenbacka, 2001) within a particular Ecuadorian airline company. Although this research can include several characteristics that may be identified in other contexts, it should be seen as a start point of studies into this field.

Dependability deploys an auditing approach from the researcher, in order to evaluate and keep transparency in the study conducted (Bryman, 2012). Basically it requires to keep the empirical material obtained during the process. Therefore, all the participants have been informed that the audio-recordings from the interviews will be preserved for six months, as well as the transcripts and coding, in order to strive for transparency in all the process of data collection.

Confirmability is the criteria that has in consideration the researcher's level of objectivity within social science studies, since qualitative researches include a certain level of subjectivity (Bryman, 2012). In this criteria the researcher tries to ensure that the process of the study is done in good faith (Bryman, 2012). Since the study aims to explore how leadership is co-constructed in an Ecuadorian air service organization, the research includes opinions, feelings and perceptions. Bearing this in mind, it would be difficult to obtain deep insights about this topic using quantitative approach, which is based in objectivity. Hence, even though it is complex to be entirely objective with this specific topic, the knowledge and implementation of different protocols help to limit the subjectivity in the analysis of the empirical data.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethics considerations are a vital aspect, especially in this type of research where besides the construction of deep insights, the researcher must protect the privacy and anonymity of the

respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, according to Silverman (2013) every research must consider several ethical aspects such as voluntary participation of the respondents, confidentiality of the respondents, obtaining informed consent from the respondents, not doing harm to the respondents and provide transparent information to the respondents about the study.

Although several characteristics of the participants are relevant to conduct the study and make the interpretation of the empirical data, their names have been changed into pseudonyms names. Thus the names of the respondents, other individuals or even the air service organization were not mentioned during the interviews and the research project.

Additionally, in the first contact and also before starting the interviews, the participants were informed regarding the research purpose, estimated length of the interview, consideration of anonymity, freedom to participate and withdraw from this study and permission to audio-record the entire interview for academic purposes. Concerning the audio-recordings, each interviewee was also informed that they will be kept for six months and a confirmation will be provided when the audio-recordings are deleted.

A formal consent letter was intended to be sent to the air service organization. However, since the airline company's name is not mentioned in the research, the department in charge did not consider it necessary for this particular study. In general terms, the researcher can ensure that ethical guidelines were considered during the complete process of the study.

3.5 Limitations

Research studies inevitably include different limitations during the data collection process and in this case study there are indeed some relevant boundaries such as the given time frame. In this sense, Yin (2003) recommends to conduct pilot case studies before the real research; however, this proposal could not be performed due to the limited deadline. Nevertheless, in general terms there is enough literature regarding this topic, hence previous knowledge could be obtained before the development of the study and collection of empirical material.

Additionally, the limited time frame constrained the sample size of the study, considering seven participants with whom it was conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. This aspect restricts any generalization, but since the research is an exploratory case study (Yin, 2013) and that as qualitative research the main aim is to generate understanding (Stenbacka, 2001), generalization

is less urgent when knowledge is still searched and findings are considered the best available for the moment (Gummesson, 2000).

Moreover, due to the established deadline, only in-depth semi-structured interviews were considered for the collection of data. Nonetheless, the sensitivity of the topic and the desire of acquiring deep insights made it understand that observation, focus group or any other qualitative method would be difficult to implement, since the participants could not feel free to behave and express themselves honestly. Besides, interviews are one of the most relevant sources of information in a case study research (Yin, 2003; Bryman, 2012).

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were held in Spanish, transcribed in the same original language and finally the highlighted important statements were translated into English, which might origin a linguistic issue (Bryman & Bell, 2011). During the interviews the participants used phrases or slangs that evidence a cultural connotation and do not have exact translation to English. However, the researcher is a native Spanish speaker with enough English skills, hence this linguistic limitation do not impact the findings.

Concerning the process of the interviews, due to the time zone difference between Sweden and Ecuador, it was difficult to arrange specific hours according to the availability of the participants. In addition, the interviews were virtually conducted through Skype, which in some occasions caused additional difficulties such as bad audio quality or outage of the video call. Occasionally this situation provoked stress and upset in the participants misdirecting the interview, but the interviewer tried to create a comfortable atmosphere by opportunely correcting this technical adversity, in order to avoid those behaviors from the interviewees. Sometimes this situation made the interviewer to take a leading role in the procedure, but the participation of the researcher did not interfere in the interviewees' answers.

Finally, although it could be considered a strength the fact that the participants know each other professionally for several years, at the beginning of some interviews it was evident that many opinions and/or perceptions were not completely true in order of not giving negative comments about their coworkers. In this regard, it is essential an honest participation of the interviewer and interviewee to avoid omission or misinterpretation of the collected data (Gummesson, 2000). Aware of this relevant consideration, the interviewees were encouraged to feel free of giving their positive or negative opinions and the confidentiality/anonymity consideration was emphasized during the process, which changed the direction of the interviews into an honest dialogue.

4. Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical material obtained through the in-depth semi-structured interviews, classified into the following categories: leadership in the air service organization, factors contributing the leadership co-construction, leader-follower involvement, leader-follower relationship, leader's influence, leader's profile and concluding with a model designed according to the findings of this particular case study. Implementing the abductive approach, these categories were created making a linkage between the collected data and the theoretical framework, aiming to explore how leadership is co-constructed in an Ecuadorian air service organization.

Regarding the co-construction, figure 5 of the *leader-member exchange theory development process*, describes the importance of both individuals in the leadership co-construction, since leaders would not exist without the followers (Yukl, 2013; DuBrin, 2010). However, the theoretical framework and empirical data indicates that the initial interaction is crucial into this process and it is started by the leader. Therefore, the categories were also defined in order to understand this aspect of the leadership co-construction process, where four categories are focused in the leader and two provide an understanding about the leader-follower interaction. Moreover, each category includes the opinions of leaders and followers of this service organization under study, which provides an overarching knowledge about how both individuals affect each other in the leadership co-construction process.

4.1 Leadership in the air service organization

This dimension was created in order to understand how is perceived leadership among the employees of this airline company. Leadership is about process, individuals and the influence in the relationship between them (Bass, 1960; Yukl, 2013). However, traditionally the Ecuadorian management is known as authoritarian (Martz, 1996), especially among middle and senior managers, who focus in monitoring the subordinates. The opinions of the supervisors are that this organization is not perceived as leadership oriented.

> *"I believe that in Ecuador there is no culture of developing leadership. In the company there is no much coaching [...] the leader must understand the personalities to work with each individually [...] leadership comes with the person, but also can be developed". (Claudia, supervisor).*

"The airline needs to be more focused in the employees, it focuses a lot on the procedures and reaching the goals [...] the leaders need to know what happens to the people inside and outside the organization". (Paula, supervisor).

According to Hayes, Caldwell, Licona and Meyer (2015), not coaching the employees interferes the creation of followership. Besides, some individuals have natural leader qualities (Yukl, 2013), hence the personalities involved are important in leadership, because it helps to understand the combination of traits that the individuals possess and facilitates the communication with each individual subordinate (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2007).

The employees are in charge of performing procedures in order to reach the organizational goals, but the perception is that they are not prioritized. The interviewees believe that the main focus is on procedures and reaching goals, as Hofstede (2001) defines the Ecuadorian culture.

"The counter ticket offices work just fine because we are constantly evaluated and measured [...] I do not think that the different forms of leading affect the performance of the office because then we would have problems, but I do think that it affects the feeling of the agents or the organizational climate". (Tamara, sales agent).

The staff is constantly monitored through evaluations as part of an *active management by exception* of the transactional leadership (Gill, 2006). Therefore, the performance is not affected but it affects the emotional condition of the subordinates. Nevertheless, inside the units of analysis the perception of leadership is different, where the subordinates feel a more transformational leadership (Burns, 1978).

"In the office the leadership is strongly defined, because in the airline we must work hard as a team and the leader must give confidence and guidance to solve situations". (Mia, sales agent).

These quotes demonstrate the general perception towards leadership in this airline company. While the supervisors who report to a middle manager perceive a constrained leadership in the organization, the subordinates have a different perspective; showing that it differs according to who is the direct report of the interviewee.

This initial dimension is relevant, since it provides the frame of knowledge about how the staff positions the airline company in terms of leadership and how this perception could trigger the leadership co-construction; in an air service organization that seems to implement transactional leadership, while their operational leaders are more oriented to transformational leadership.

4.2 Factors contributing the leadership co-construction

The analysis of empirical data supports the fact that leaders would not exist without the followers (Yukl, 2013; DuBrin, 2010). The contribution of both parties are interconnected and for that reason the next two sub-categories were summarized into this overarching dimension.

4.2.1 Leader's contribution

The participants identified different characteristics that leaders provide in order to create a leadership co-construction, being communication one of the most frequently mentioned as essential (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). The participants tended to specify transformational factors as contributions, defined as well by different scholars (Bass, 1990; Bass, 1999; Yukl, 2013).

Influence is important in the leadership process, which is performed in first place by the leader towards the followers (Bass, 1960; Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2013). In this regard, one of the participants argued that personalities collaborate and that leaders influence more on followers than viceversa.

> *"[…] trust, respect, knowing that you can count on each other, a lot of communication, knowledge and self-control […] the followers have less influence on the leader, but they do it anyway, because the different personalities collaborate in this influence". (Claudia, supervisor).*

> *"[…] to know how to negotiate, charisma, creativity, know the people, good communicator, prudent, use positive feedback and never be afraid of the leader's reaction". (Paula, supervisor).*

As supervisor, not being afraid of the leader's reaction was identified as an important factor, even though it was not mentioned by the majority of interviewees. Due to the Ecuadorian context, this might be related with the *power distance* defined by Hofstede (2001), which in Ecuador has a high score, meaning that superiority is recognized by the less powerful members. In the following

quote, good communication was reinforced as a relevant factor and empathy also contributes in the creation of deep connection in the teamwork (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005).

> *"The team is part of the process, it is important to be self-critical, self-evaluate, innovate, communicate, being empathetic and implement teamwork". (Andrew, supervisor).*

Being strong, motivating confidence and including the recognition of the employees' need contributes in the achievement of organizational goals as a team (Avolio & Bass, 2004; DuBrin, 2010). Additionally, in the specific context of this Ecuadorian airline company, coexistence was identified as an important factor of this working atmosphere. It provides a deep connection in the leadership co-construction, but it is also capable to create vulnerability in the process.

> *"The leader must be strong and confident […] the coexistence in an airline makes you be friend of your group and friendship complicates making certain decisions". (Ana, coordinator).*

Furthermore, the sales agents added other factors to be included in the leaders' contribution such as experience together with knowledge and the need of reducing the hierarchical gap where the leader could be seen in the same level as the follower.

> *"Leadership is provoked by experience and knowledge; which creates confidence; also communication and openness are important […] being at the same level and not setting much hierarchy is important to build leadership among supervisor and agents, but we must set limits and respect, otherwise the agents might believe that all is about friendship". (Mia, sales agent).*

However, there was no specific reference about diagnosing and adaptation that should be done by the leader in order to promote an organizational change as well as avoiding the routine in the daily interactions (Carnall, 2007; Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005).

4.2.2 Follower's contribution

In this air service organization the followers are important in the process, since the leader's role is affected by them (Sinha, 2012). Their contribution is showing interest and understanding in the different activities; providing initiatives and participating proactively.

> *"The agents contribute with networking, interest on learning […] are assertive with me and I have learned to be assertive and patient". (Claudia, supervisor).*

> *"It is important that the agents are understanding; which generates fellowship and union". (Ana, coordinator).*

The followers have expanded knowledge acquired from the daily experience of the different procedures of the company, which provides the possibility to enrich their team. They contribute behaving as *activists* followers, with a *competence and focus* quality (DuBrin, 2010; Everett, 2016).

> *"The agents provide information from their daily experience […] they provide many ideas that the supervisor and I do not have and listening is important, we must understand that we must help each other". (Stephanie, coordinator).*

Supervisors as followers converge into the characteristics of a leader, giving the impression that they tend to behave in both roles at the same time, which complements leadership to achieve organizational goals (Howell & Costley, 2006). They contribute in the problem identification and solving to support the decision-making process.

> *"I am always in communication with my boss about the results and progress of the office and I make her know as soon as possible, as a kind of feedback and now she does similarly. Any bad news must include with a proposed solution". (Andrew, supervisor).*

The participants did not mention commitment to the organization in an emotional connection and also no information was given about the followers' fulfilment in the obtention of rewards offered by the leader (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Yukl, 2013).

4.3 Leader-follower involvement

Involvement is one of the most relevant aspects that helps measuring the high-exchange and low-exchange interaction of the leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Yukl, 2013). Therefore two sub-categories were established in this dimension.

4.3.1 Regular involvement

Involvement is what gives confidence in the leadership co-construction process (Barnard, 1938). In the context of this air service organization, involvement is not only a mere professional interaction, but also being intimate with each other. Moreover, gender plays an important role that can set the parameters to approach differently to involve each member or group. The *masculinity* society argued by Hofstede (2001) gives rigidness, focused in competition and achieving success; which affects females in the Ecuadorian context who are more susceptible to these conditions.

> *"I had to involve myself as a friend, to be close, empathetic; otherwise they do not listen to you [...] they are all women and it is difficult to work with a mostly female group, although I am a woman. They are very sensitive". (Stephanie, coordinator).*

The Ecuadorian society favors *collectivism* meaning that in this culture involvement is relevant (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, it is important to have an optimal initial interaction as described in the model of leader-member exchange theory development process (Figure 6) (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Active meetings and empowerment are crucial, as well as the implementation of a *dyadic process* to generate impact in each individual follower in order to stimulate the group effectiveness (Yukl, 2013).

> *"I tried to know the agents with one-to-one meetings and doing activities so they can know and interact among each other [...] the different activities caused involvement within the team [...] now the agents even correct each other to help themselves grow". (Claudia, supervisor).*

> *"I feel involved because I work a lot as a team with my supervisor. I help her with ideas to find solutions [...] for the new supervisor I was a great support to help her know the agents, to know how to work with them. The supervisor has also supported me a lot to make me feel involved with my work and make the team count on me". (Ana, coordinator).*

Involvement is reached by valuing and fostering the self-management quality of the followers (DuBrin, 2010; Everett, 2016), seeing them as organizational assets.

> *"I contribute with ideas, in certain procedures I am the one who says which are the best ways to do it [...] I always inform my coordinator; the communication with her is very good. We analyze things together and then I give the information to my colleagues and the coordinator does it to the supervisor [...] it is motivating that the coordinator does not take credit, but she recognizes it in front of my peers and my supervisor". (Mia, sales agent).*

Knowledge contributes in the cooperation and the involvement process to establish trust and commitment in order to promote leadership co-construction (Barnard, 1938).

4.3.2 Non-involvement

Airline companies are embedded in administrative and operational tasks that participants consider deserve equal priority, otherwise it causes a non-optimal interaction in the counter ticket offices. The participants do not want an exchange of individual benefits as a transactional leadership (Winkler, 2009), but a more transformational oriented (Burns, 1978).

> *"My boss is missing involvement, sharing, participating and actively listening to her team. She should be involved, she should separate her administrative tasks from the operational ones. She does not know her team". (Claudia, supervisor).*

Followers seek for a qualitative interaction rather than a quantitative one, however some supervisors persist in applying evaluations that through numbers make them believe that it is possible to define an appropiate leadership co-construction.

> *"I perform different types of evaluations [...] I listen suggestions and I am self-critical about what to improve [...] if you have a good score you will be considered a leader, otherwise you are only a boss giving orders. The leader must know how to delegate functions". (Andrew, supervisor).*

Probably cultural considerations are making this air service organization to confront different complications along the process. The units of analysis seem not to be supported by the middle manager, which represents a disquieting situation in order to build a leadership co-construction.

4.4 Leader-follower relationship

This dimension is derived from the leader-member exchange theory that focuses on the dyadic relationship among the leader and every single follower, providing the characteristics that create an interaction of high-exchange or low-exchange; which are the two sub-categories defined (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009; Yukl, 2013; Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015).

4.4.1 High-exchange relationship

The high-exchange relationship is what gives the possibility of leadership co-construction, where the interaction among the members is vital (Bass, 1960), especially in the Ecuadorian society where *collectivism* is essential (Hofstede, 2001). The following quote provides aspects of transformational leadership, where even affection is developed (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & van den Heuvel, 2015).

> *"[…] is quite constructive […] it has also been important to apply positive feedback with them. At the beginning the relationship was very bad, so I did some activities that created a sense of belonging in the group […] now the relationship is a little paternalistic, but in that way it is easier to detect errors". (Claudia, supervisor).*

Positive feedback enhances the relationship as effective communication (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Paternalism is identified as an aspect of the process, which supports Martz (1996) who said that it is a common characteristic of the Ecuadorian culture, even though the supervisor perceives it as positive to keep track of the office performance.

Connection between leaders and followers is crucial for the relationship and it can be achieved notwithstanding similarities or differences in the personalities, which is also an important aspect of this process (Northouse, 2007). It is valued the implementation of *individualized consideration*,

considering the individual needs of the followers and giving mentor to them (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Benson, 2003; Winkler, 2009).

"With my current supervisor I feel more confident, she has helped me a lot to make the team understand that I am also in charge of them [...] she has given me confidence, security, I feel more connected to the team, everything is transparent, and she has empowered me in my role as coordinator [...] we have different personalities, but I think it has been good for the balance of the team". (Ana, coordinator).

Eritropaki and Martin (2005) argued that high quality relationships are when leader and member share compatible characteristics. The empirical data showed that participants have satisfying relationships despite this aspect. The previous quote and the following one mention differences and similarities with their supervisor, but both interviewees indicated having good relationship.

"With my previous supervisor the relationship was better, maybe because we are very similar then we had things in common. I was very surprised that she was very understanding about family problems, even though she is single with no children; I think that makes you gain confidence and motivates you to improve. She made me feel important and motivated". (Tamara, sales agent).

Moreover, showing understanding and including deep levels of connection enhances the interaction (Burns, 1978). However, in this context is not only about professional, but also personal situations to be considered, in order to achieve an *integrative approach* where the subordinates want to give additional effort or sacrifices for the group (House, 1977; Yukl, 2013). This bond is a particularity of this case study, to reach commitment and union. Nevertheless, although trust and loyalty can be reached with this type of interaction, respect is also important in the work atmosphere to improve the organizational performance (Yukl, 2013).

"The relationship improved because in the type of work that we have there is much coexistence, familiarity is created due to the large number of hours that you spend with the group, you talk about work and personal issues which help you to empathize. At the beginning

it was not a relationship but an imposition and it did not work, the coexistence improved it and
now there is an exchange and empathy". (Stephanie, coordinator).

Due to the nature of this professional activity, coexistence is created and with the degree of reciprocity (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997) the high-exchange relationship is reinforced.

4.4.2 Low-exchange relationship

The relationship is less mutual and the followers are focused in the accomplishment of tasks in order to receive benefits from the organization, which is related to transactional leadership (Yukl, 2013). The following quote mentions some characteristics of high-exchange relationship, but it does not provide the vibe of closeness and deep level of commitment.

"[…] is very cordial, in some cases there is camaraderie, but always with respect. I think
I am seen as a person that people can communicate without any problems. I try to collaborate
them on things that are under my control, without neglecting labor issues". (Andrew,
supervisor).

The relationship is not about going beyond the expectations, but giving what is possible to provide. Lack of empowerment and not challenging the subordinates to perform high standards are aspects that affect the leader-follower relationship (Yulk & Van Fleet, 1982).

"[…] he did not make the team to notice that I was also in charge of the office, the agents
solved everything directly with him, there was no respect and no good circuit for performing
the tasks […] we had very similar personalities, we both were very soft and there was no
balance". (Ana, coordinator).

Although personalities are described as very similar, it shows an unbalanced relationship with limited delegation of tasks and no evidence of leadership co-construction. The *uncertainty avoidance* constrains the connection (Hofstede, 2001), making the leaders focusing in the administrative tasks rather than the human resource.

"I feel disconnected with my current supervisor, she is not focused on leadership. There is a lack of connection, I feel that she is very focused on administrative tasks [...] it is a very superficial relationship, there is no much understanding among us [...] I do not feel supported and fond to her". (Tamara, sales agent).

The disconnection of leader and follower is an obstacle to achieve the organizational goals. The data collected identified a difficult relationship and limited communication with the middle manager. The empirical material provides a conflictive working atmosphere, where the followers seek a high-exchange relationship that is not performed by this leader.

"With my boss is a suffocating relationship and she does not focus on you as a person". (Paula, supervisor).

"The boss does not like that the supervisors and coordinators become too close with the agents". (Mia, sales agent).

Power distance, authoritarianism and active management by exception (Hofstede, 2001; Martz, 1996; Gill, 2006) are part of the tense leader-follower relationship with the middle manager. The empirical data described a negative relationship at the beginning, which in most of the cases eventually changed into a positive one, mainly because of the coexistence that exists as a particularity in this Ecuadorian airline company.

4.5 Leader's influence

In this process "influence is the essence of leadership" (Yukl, 2013, p. 188) that affects each other's behavior (Bass, 1960). In this case every participant agreed that the leader influences the group, where personalities are also important in modifying behaviors or attitudes of the followers (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). This category was defined due to its importance in the study and according to the empirical data two sub-categories were established.

4.5.1 Idealized influence

The *dyadic process* focuses on influence in a reciprocal manner (Yukl, 2013), even though the participants argued that it starts from the leader. The supervisors try to go beyond expectations by

mentoring the followers with *individualized consideration* (Bass & Avolio, 1994), but it is problematic to affect in such way to non-interested or low motivated followers (DuBrin, 2010).

"The leader influences in most of the people [...] it is gratifying that they strive to implement improvements and do something without being asked [...] you generate influence updating knowledge, teaching how to make a presentation, how to structure an e-mail and now they all do very well". (Andrew, supervisor).

Through influence the leader fosters participation and professional development in each member of the group, creating commitment and motivation as a team. The followers identified support as a relevant way of influence. In addition, aspects of transformational leadership were also mentioned in order to encourage and challenge the followers to perform high standards and become creative (Yulk & Van Fleet, 1982; Bass, 1985; Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Benson, 2003).

"Yes indeed, the leader influences [...] my current supervisor has generated respect, the group works better, much has changed in the office. We all feel supported, capable to make decisions with confidence [...] the atmosphere has changed, everyone likes to have openness, and everyone contributes". (Ana, coordinator).

"I think that my performance has been influenced by my supervisor, because she invites you to participate [...] if there is a new procedure she motivates you to check and expose it to the group, to make it clear [...] she influences me to grow professionally [...] she has supported me a lot". (Mia, sales agent).

The leader's influence goes beyond achieving organizational goals, where mutuality was not mentioned. This category gives the perception that influencing is only the leader's responsibility.

4.5.2 Non-idealized influence

A leader can also influence in a non-idealized way, making the supervisor to lead his or her team in a contrary way; which has been indicated among the participants of this air service organization. The rigidness of this airline company makes necessarily to go further than just exchanging individual benefits and monitoring execution of tasks (Gill, 2006; Winkler, 2009).

"I think my boss has influenced on me to do the opposite of what she does, she has shown me things I do not want to adopt, she has not influenced my style, but in how I build my leadership [...] it is easier to know what you do not want, rather than what you really want". (Claudia, supervisor).

"The leader does influence the group. Recently there was a change of supervisor in the office and it was felt, because the new supervisor is much strict, I even know that the atmosphere ceased to be nice, but you have to adapt yourself". (Paula, supervisor).

It is normally seen as more important the influence executed by the leader over the follower (Yukl, 2013). Power seems to work as a medium of influence (Avery, 2004; Bass, 1985) in a top-down structure that affects the harmony and motivation among the subordinates.

"The previous supervisor did not have the initiative to generate the same openness and the team had no desire to work". (Ana, coordinator).

Transactional influence affects the followers and the way they feel about the working atmosphere, since they seek for personal development that some leaders are not performing as an essential criteria (Northouse, 2007). The rigidness of this air service organization and the characteristics of the Ecuadorian culture show incompatibility with a full transactional influence that is not happening when transformational characteristics are implemented. Nonetheless, it was mentioned that the followers need to adapt themselves in such kind of conditions, constrained by societal aspects that restrict *diehards* followers (DuBrin, 2010).

4.6 Leader's profile

This dimension derives from the *full range leadership model* proposed by Bass (1985), describing different leadership styles. The empirical data revealed that the different leader's hierarchies of these units of analysis possess diverse profiles of leadership styles. Therefore, sub-categories were defined for each position, contributing in reaching the aim of this study.

4.6.1 Coordinators

On one hand, there is the coordinator with traits of transforming leader who is completely engaged to the team, uses communication and genuine interest to stimulate the sense of belonging and closeness to create friendship among the members (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1999; Yukl, 2013).

> *"[…] is very relaxed and her style is to get along with everyone, as friends and be close. She always communicates everything and you feel her part of your team, it seems that she is on the same side that the agents and that creates a lot of confidence […] she is more people oriented, her priority is the team and then the airline". (Mia, sales agent).*

On the other hand, there is the coordinator who avoids the leader's role having a breve interaction and null involvement with the followers; performing characteristics of laissez-faire leadership with limited communication and sharing of knowledge (Sadler, 2003; Winkler, 2009; Yukl, 2013; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

> *"The other coordinator is much more reserved, I do not consider him a leader. He is good at knowledge and methodical, but does not have the attitude of a leader. He is very quiet, disengaged, he only says what people ask him and does not share his knowledge […] he is not very active and I think that is an important quality of a leader, for me a leader has to be brilliant". (Mia, sales agent).*

The interviewee feels confident with the leader who is engaged to the group and worried in the creation of a truly connection, which is related to the sense of belonging that prevails in the Ecuadorian society (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001). Although knowledge was included in the dimension *factors contributing the leadership co-construction*, it is not considered as relevant if a deep connection is not part of the interaction.

4.6.2 Supervisors

The empirical material has constantly shown that transformational leadership is more accepted among the subordinates of this air service organization, where high level of engagement is a priority (Burns, 1978).

"My current supervisor is a leader […] she likes helping, listening, supporting, understanding and is flexible with the processes; without doing wrong things. She tries to find the way to give calm to the team, not to have problems and achieves the empathy of the agents […]". (Ana, coordinator).

Although some interactions started with a tense first contact, the particularity of coexistence in some cases improved the process of co-construction.

"[…] my current supervisor was authoritarian […] she was a chief giving orders, instilling fear to achieve goals and contacting us in a bad manner. She managed to understand that she needs to join her group, to know what is wrong, to listen and to remain silent when it is necessary, to understand that she also needs our support […] however, sometimes she leaves us alone […]". (Stephanie, coordinator).

The supervisors give importance to feedback from their subordinates, working with principles of equity, where hierarchy does not interfere in the process and leadership co-construction. Effective communication is important in this leadership process (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010), by implementing an *individualized consideration* (Winkler, 2009) to understand the needs of the followers and their specific characteristics in this context, such as gender that is a remarkable consideration in a population mostly composed by females who tend to be more susceptible.

"My previous supervisor was very sincere and not everyone took it in the best way. Most of us were women so there was a lot of sensitivity in the group, which sometimes is inconvenient […] she is a very emotional person, thoughtful and effusive to communicate […]". (Stephanie, coordinator).

In a business company either way the organizational goals must be accomplished, the interaction during the process is what makes the difference in the working atmosphere (Aarons, 2006; Bass, 1999; Avolio & Bass, 2004; Northouse, 2007; Bass & Riggio, 2006). The empirical material has shown that the same leader can behave with characteristics from different leadership styles, even though one might be more representative over any other (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass,

1999). The leaders on one hand show and promote commitment while on the other hand they establish clear goals and group norms (Bass, 1998).

> *"My supervisor gives importance to the important things and is rigid in what must be rigid. She is not based on established processes or policies, she goes beyond that […] now there is a more relaxed atmosphere and she creates more participation […]". (Mia, sales agent).*

Nevertheless, even though in this type of service organization leaders need to implement different kinds of behavior according to the leadership styles, they must apply an equilibrium. The followers of this air service organization tend to feel more comfortable and confident when there exists deep connection that goes beyond the professional aspects.

Leadership cannot be co-constructed if a member is affected by external situations, hence the leaders need to clarify the professional and personal issues. The subordinates of this airline company seek a strong bond; therefore, the leaders face the challenge to include themselves into a deep connection and at the same time keep the respect of the professional interaction.

> *"The current supervisor is more like a boss who makes you work regardless of whether you have personal problems […] she imposes, is not empathetic, sets a lot of hierarchy, does not know how to handle personal situations and makes you feel silly when you make a mistake". (Tamara, sales agent).*

The emotional interaction is a relevant aspect of these units of analysis that makes convenient from the leader's side to implement high-exchange relationship and continuous involvement, since the followers do not expect a mere exchange interaction (Winkler, 2009). Therefore, the leader needs to show flexibility and give equal priority to administrative and operational tasks in order to avoid rejection from the subordinates.

> *"[…] straight, strict, always following procedures and not so permissive. I think he was afraid to make decisions that could affect his supervisor role and he was not a person who takes risks for his team. I do not consider him a leader, but a boss". (Ana, coordinator).*

The interviewees identified the supervisors that lack of courage, which is a critical quality in this air service organization and the Ecuadorian context. The subordinates value a leader who takes risks and has the courage to support the team, creating an *idealized influence* of admiration and respect (Bass, 1985; Carnall, 2007).

4.6.3 Middle manager

The supervisors that implement transformational traits with their subordinates define their leader as a person anchored in the old era of management. Monitoring, controlling, marking a strong hierarchy and applying a style based on power are considered as some of the most important characteristics; where her personality overpowers her ability to lead. The middle manager's skills are scarce in a service environment where leading aptitude is primordial.

> *"My boss has moments of leadership and others of boss. She has grown in the old school […] her personality is stronger than her skills and she does not like to lose or feel that is losing control of the situation, for that reason sometimes she takes tough decisions without being equitable". (Claudia, supervisor).*

> *"[…] she is a boss, she is not a person of results, but a person who is constantly monitoring […] is not about how you want to do things, but how she wants you to do it. I also do not like that she does the admonitions in front of other people, whereas the congratulations are few and only by e-mail, although she copies everyone involved. She is not a good communicator, is impertinent, does not use the proper tone, there is no empowerment, minimizes our hierarchy and does not like us to apply for other positions". (Paula, supervisor).*

Allen and Meyer (1990) argued that there are different forms of commitment within an organization, being the emotional connection the one that seems to be more suitable in this context. Nonetheless, in this case study some participants feel committed to their direct leaders or to the group itself, but not to the organization. Probably this is caused due to the constrained attitude from the middle manager who is in charge of the entire group. *Collectivism* (Hofstede, 2001) is not performed by the middle manager, while *power distance* (Hofstede, 2001) is evident from the followers' point of view. However, the only male supervisor described her slightly different from the other interviewees.

"Now I consider my boss as a leader. She is dominant, not so flexible and she does not let emotions affect her [...] for her it is important a follower who contributes with ideas, takes active participation, and gives argumentative proposals. She is interested in promoting, but many things are beyond her reach. One must know how to communicate with her, otherwise she can have unexpected reactions [...]". (Andrew, supervisor).

Although the first part of his description mentions a tough and unemotional person, he also argues positive aspects that he specifically perceives. In this case, he and the middle manager are perceived as merely bosses or individuals with transactional traits. Therefore, this particular compatibility supports Eritropaki and Martin (2005) who argued that compatible characteristics provide a high quality relationship, even though the interaction between supervisors and their subordinates has some exceptions regarding this argument.

4.7 Chapter summary

The results of the empirical material show the importance of this research in a context that has not been developed enough, at least academically speaking. Previous theories and models related to leadership co-construction were connected to the findings obtained through the gathered data.

The results demonstrate that many theories already defined apply in this Ecuadorian air service organization, even though some aspects differ according to this cultural and business reality. In this case, coexistence and the emotional bond that includes personal issues are particular characteristics provided by the participants of this airline company.

According to table 1, the employees in different roles of leaders and followers identified several factors that contribute in the leadership co-construction process, but their perception is that the organization as a whole is not making an effective implementation, mainly because it is struggling between a transactional leadership performed by middle and senior managers while the units of analysis are trying to evolve and create a more transformational working atmosphere.

Categories / Participants	Leadership in the air service organization	Factors contributing the leadership co-construction	Leader-follower involvement	Leader-follower relationship	Leader's influence	Leader's profile
Sales agents	- Constantly monitored - Priority to administrative tasks	- Assertiveness, patience, interest, support, proactivity, empowerment	- Contributing and sharing opinions - Task-oriented supervisor	- Friendship, intimacy - Disconnected, superficial	- Motivation, support - Affects the working atmosphere	- Improvement, flexibility, people-oriented - Rigid, too much hierarchy
Coordinators	- Leaders are identified, they take tough decisions	- Knowledge from experience, teamwork, active participation	- Empathy, friendship, support, informality, dynamic, teamwork	- Freedom, coexistence, empathy - Bad connection, rigurous	- Teamwork, support - No openness	- Listener, emotional, supportive - Strict, afraid to make decisions
Supervisors	- No leadership culture - No coaching - Task-oriented	- Trust, respect, communication, negotiation, creativity, innovation	- Meetings, activities, empowerment - Evaluations - Boss is not involved	- Constructive, positive feedback, paternalistic, democratic - Tough, suffocating, fear	- Mentoring, knowledge - Negative influence from the boss	- Tough decisions, task-oriented, boss, bad communication, increases hierarchical gap

Table 1: Analysis of results (Romero, 2016)

Regarding the performance of the counter ticket offices, the following model of leadership co-construction (figure 7) was designed in order to provide a global perspective of this process in this air service organization. According to the frequencies, eight factors were defined as the most relevant that contribute the enhancement of the coexistence, which reinforces a high-exchange interaction between leader and follower that concludes into an emotional and professional relationship.
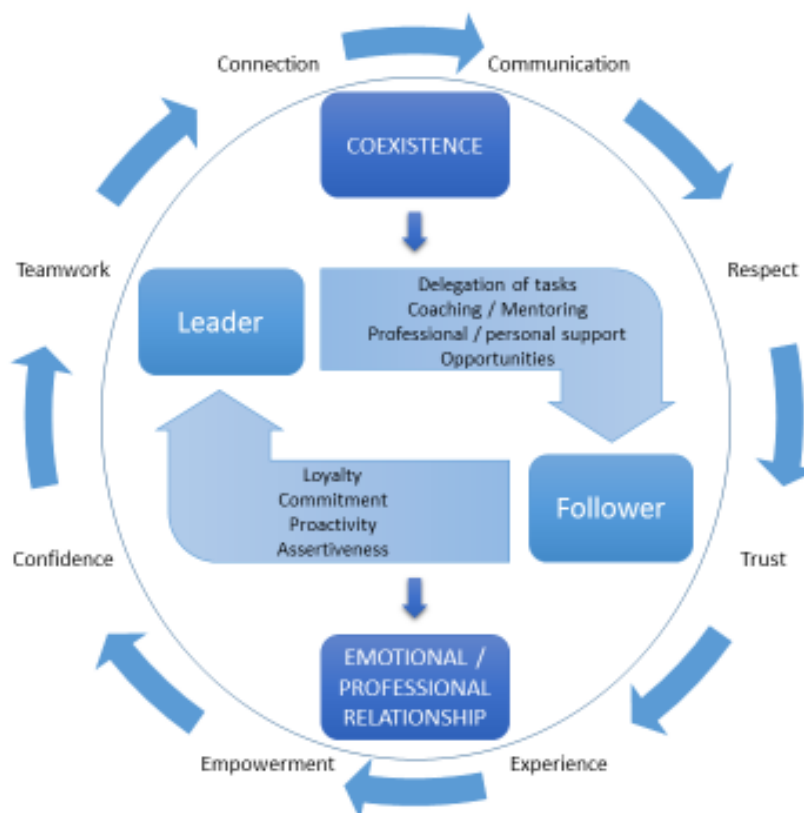

Figure 7: Model of leadership co-construction in an Ecuadorian air service organization (Romero, 2016)

5. Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how leadership is co-constructed in a service organization and for its research a case study that drew attention and which manifests itself as a problematic situation is specifically in the area of the counter ticket offices of an Ecuadorian airline company. To reach this objective the study was concentrated on leadership in the air service organization, factors contributing the leadership co-construction, leader-follower involvement, leader-follower relationship, leader's influence and leader's profile; using a purposive sampling of employees that conform the counter ticket offices within the customer service department of the mentioned carrier.

Due to the aim defined, the abductive approach was considered to be the most appropiate to generate an understanding of this particular case study, considering that it gives the possibility to make the analysis using the existing literature and the different insights from the empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). This chapter provides the discussion of the previous analysis of the empirical data, making a linkage between the research question and theoretical framework.

In order to make a clear understanding of this discussion, it is necessary to understand that the Ecuadorian society accepts inequality with the believe of superiority from senior and middle managers, needs to fulfil the sense of belonging, is success-oriented with less focus in the individual itself and includes rigid organizational procedures to be performed (Hofstede, 2001).

The empirical material revealed that this air service organization as a whole does not show deep interest in its subordinates and is more concentrated in administrative tasks, rather than the human resource, showing focus in the transactional leadership. This is noticed by the managerial approach shown by the middle manager, which seems to be the reflection of the organizational culture, implanted by senior managers. Consequently, some supervisors experience conflict between being people-oriented with their followers in the counter ticket offices and being task-oriented, as a result of the influence of power imposed by the middle manager (Avery, 2004; Bass, 1985).

The employees of these units of analysis, object of the investigation, show interest in developing leadership co-construction and even identify a *trait approach*, where some individuals possess natural leader's qualities (Yukl, 2013). However, it seems not to be supported by the middle manager in charge of this department, who avoids involvement and prioritizing the team. Additionally, the middle manager demands formal interaction, even though in this context formalism is usually rejected by the followers, who need more informality and empathy from leaders.

The results showed that transactional leadership is implemented by the middle manager towards the followers with a structured interaction that actually does not affect the performance of the different offices, since monitoring tasks are continuously performed as part of the *active management by exception* (Gill, 2006). Nonetheless, this way of conducting the interaction does affect the working atmosphere, in a society where *collectivism* is important.

The findings also showed that most of the supervisors behave with transformational traits, whereas the middle manager was described as transactional. The employee commitment to the organization is low, while their commitment to the supervisors and/or coordinators is high when they show traits of transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, 1999). In addition even though the leadership traits might be different, the results showed the leaders' preference of working with *activists* followers. On one hand they reject the disengaged followers, but on the other hand they also tend to avoid the risk of having *diehards* followers (DuBrin, 2010).

Consistent to the expectations, it was identified that transformational leadership is significantly related to emotions, where leaders even change their feelings and behaviors in order to be aligned with their followers. At the beginning the leader-follower relationships were difficult and negative, especially because of the different leadership styles applied. Therefore, this situation created tense interaction that was modified through time, according to the particular daily work experience of this air service organization. Besides, in this context the leadership co-construction is not only influenced by the relationship between leaders and followers, but also the nature of work, type of organization and external environment as part of the *situational approach* (Yukl, 2013). The empirical data showed that the process of creating leadership co-construction varies according to the nature of each leader. The more active participation the leader executes, the higher quality relationship he or she might develop with the followers.

The results of the study revealed that the employees of these investigated units agree that leaders would not exist without followers and leadership is a process of social exchange, where followers have a relevant importance providing knowledge to the group, through the daily experience they acquire in their operational tasks. Nonetheless, the results also informed that followers co-construct in the extent to which the leader takes the first step to foster their participation. Hence, the leader always begins the leadership co-construction process, where the first impression and interaction are essential, as described in Figure 6. This is mainly because of the paradigm in the

Ecuadorian culture of implementing development through role models, where followers need to be motivated to become part of the involvement process.

Several factors were mentioned during the interviews, but the most important in accordance to the frequency are communication, respect, trust, experience, empowerment, confidence, teamwork and connection; which are also considered by different authors (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990; Bass, 1999; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Additionally, the followers' contribution considers assertiveness, proactivity, understanding, loyalty, engagement and showing interest; supported by Kahn (1990).

Due to the inequality characterized by the *power distance* (Hofstede, 2001) of the Ecuadorian society and the *power-influence approach* of this service organization (Yukl, 2013), the participants also identified the need of reducing the concept of the hierarchical gap, from a vertical top-down relationship to a more horizontal one; in order to have a relationship where harmony prevails and the leadership co-construction can be effective, keeping the respect of each other's roles. C*ourage* as a quality of the followers (DuBrin, 2010) was not mentioned by all the participants, probably because of the socio-cultural criteria of considering conflictive to fight for the individual's ideals, especially when the situation includes people with diverse hierarchies.

Regarding involvement and relationship, the results also showed that the coordinators' role is as a representative of the sales agents in front of the supervisors and if they do not perform that function, the acceptance from the sales agents decreases. Therefore, the coordinators need to be fully involved to the group with an active participation, creating deep levels of connection (Burns, 1978). However, in this case study it was identified a remarkable factor, which is the coexistence included in the working environment. This aspect provokes a strong commitment and relationship, but it can also create vulnerability in the leadership co-construction process.

The coexistence is supported by the factors previously mentioned and identified through the empirical data, creating an involvement that is more than a mere professional interaction; it implies a close relationship of mutual interest, where professional and even personal issues take part of the process. The results showed that followers seek to have a qualitative relationship instead of a quantitative one. Nevertheless, the organization focuses in impersonal evaluations, which decrease the commitment among the personnel; even though the emotional bond plays a crucial role among the subordinates of this air service organization.

The results also demonstrated that personality is relevant in the leader-follower relationship, supporting Northouse's (2007) point of view and that it also can be influenced by the gender of

the subordinates. However, the empirical data showed that even though the personalities play an important role, this interaction's core is the compatibility among transactional or transformational traits that the actors have, to motivate themselves in creating a leadership co-construction.

Regarding the gender, the findings showed that it has importance in this air service organization, since the empirical data mentioned that females are usually more susceptible to the rigidness characterized in this airline company and the Ecuadorian society. Hence, the leader normally has to apply a different approach according to this aspect. Moreover, through this study it has been noticed that the leader-follower relationship with the middle manager is described as negative when both actors are females, which does not happen when the actors have different genders.

This air service organization is struggling about which leadership style should fit better in order to have motivated and committed employees, which is the problem discussion of this study. In this case, the units of analysis are oriented to a transformational leadership, while the middle manager implements a transactional one. According to the nature of this air service organization, the findings showed that leaders need to implement combined traits of transformational and transactional leadership in order to balance the interaction, increasing commitment and motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

This research has created new insights regarding leadership co-construction, by giving a new perspective in a context of a developing country, where realities are often different from the theories developed by the scholars. This study is a theoretical contribution to the science of service management, specifically to leadership and management of air service organizations, expecting to expand the knowledge in this field.

Several models have been designed according to other industries and countries, mainly developed ones. Nevertheless, this study proposes the first step of a new model that describes leadership co-construction process from the point of view of an Ecuadorian airline company, providing an understanding of what are the specific characteristics to co-construct leadership in an effective and optimal way, as shown in figure 8.

Moreover, it is important to mention the contribution that provides this study, by identifying the presence of coexistence and the emotional bond that it includes in order to achieve a prosperous leadership co-construction, where it is a requirement for the leader to go beyond professional tasks in the daily activities. Additionally, as already mentioned, the findings also propose the need of minimizing the hierarchical gap, in order to perceive equality among leader and followers.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to provide an understanding of how leadership is co-constructed in the context of an Ecuadorian air service organization, which implies a societal reality that has similarities and differences to the already developed theories regarding this topic. This exploratory case study was mainly focused in the role of leaders and followers, as well as the interaction that both actors perform; analyzing opinions, perceptions and emotions through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews for the collection of empirical material.

The data analysis revealed that in this context some relevant factors are not included in the existing models, such as coexistence and emotional bond that enrich the study and enhance the importance of acquiring the knowledge of a different working atmosphere that offers new insights about the leadership co-construction.

Several leadership theories have been created, but this dyadic relationship of leaders and followers that includes an exchange process (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Winkler, 2009; Yukl, 2013), gives the possibility of expanding the knowledge of this topic, specially in a society of a developing country such as Ecuador, where this study has not been developed enough.

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following research question was defined *"How do leaders and followers co-construct leadership in an Ecuadorian air service organization?"* An airline company was chosen as case study to provide theoretical contribution and propose future research in this field.

In order to answer the research question and reach the aim of this study, a qualitative method was used to explore and analyze in-depth knowledge. For the collection of empirical data, seven participants were chosen in the role of supervisors, coordinators and sales agents who provided valuable insights regarding the leadership co-construction study.

The theoretical framework was helpful in conducting the interviews that afterwards were transcribed applying hermeneutic approach and categorized into dimensions that were designed according to frequencies detected in the different interviews (Bryman, 2012).

The results demonstrated that leaders and followers of this Ecuadorian air service organization create leadership co-construction through constant interaction that includes familiarization and close relationship, mutual interest, active participation from both actors and influence process; consisting in stimulating knowledge, empowerment, confidence, teamwork and proactivity.

In this context, communication is considered as one of the most important factors in order to maintain the relationship and core of the leadership co-construction; which validates Fairhurst and Grant (2010), who argued that this factor is essential for the integration of leaders and followers.

This process of leadership co-construction includes the aformentioned factors to enhance the particularity of this working atmosphere that is the coexistence, in order to create a dynamic and trustful high-exchange interaction that concludes in an emotional/professional relationship. The singularity of this case study is the emotional bond that specially followers seek in the leadership co-construction, which goes beyond the professional environment and actually also includes personal issues. Leaders and followers co-construct leadership by the creation of intimacy that is contributed by the nature of this professional activity.

Nonetheless, in this process of leadership co-construction there is a challenge regarding the different leadership styles that are implemented, mainly transformational and transactional; which creates conflict since the leaders usually do not implement traits from both styles.

The airline industry is a profit business that during the last years has been experiencing several difficulties. In Ecuador the situation has been more complicated due to new restrictions of the regulatory bodies, lack of investment, instability in the oil price and the decreasing demand. Hence, the airline companies have been seeking new strategies to acquire competitive advantage, increase profitability and market share.

In order to obtain positive financial results, it is necessary to understand that nowadays the employees are the key of success, considering the strong relation among employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. To the extent that the employee is satisfied, he or she will care about the customer and will support the leader. Therefore, as a service organization the main focus must be the human resource, caring of their welfare and feelings (Bass, 1990). Promoting active participation from leaders and followers, to implement an effective leadership co-construction that creates service quality linked to profitability.

After all, the main purpose of every business organization immersed in the service sector is to provide high quality customer experience, by going beyond the expectations. Hence, the organization requires leaders with a clear organizational vision that includes the followers into the process, working as a team to prosper and succeed. In this sense, leadership co-construction is the process that helps in the implementation of the appropriate strategies to create structural change and remain profitable.

Although through the development of the study there was a familiarization and the research question was answered succesfully, there were several limitations during the process. The limited time frame was considered the greatest challenge to make this study; which also constrained the sample size, restricting any generalization. Moreover, it was not possible to apply further research methods, impeding the implementation of triangulation strategy, even though Yin (2003) argues that interviews are relevant source of information in a case study research.

Additionally, airline companies conform a global industry that includes different realities not only regarding the socio-cultural aspects from the diversity of the countries involved in this business, but even different realities in the same region or country. For future research, it should be taken into account the influence of government policies in the leadership co-construction process.

Likewise, there is the risk of having discovered aspects that are characteristics of this particular air service organization that do not apply to other airline companies that operate even in the same country. However, this aspect was considered from the starting point of the study and due to the exploratory purpose of providing an understanding of how is leadership co-constructed in an Ecuadorian air service organization context, this shortcoming does not represent a flaw in the research.

Nevertheless, for future research this study should be replicated expanding the sample size to a wider range of air service organizations, to gather data from diverse sources in order to extend the scope of the study. Furthermore, the research quality could be improved by using mixed-methods, making a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, to backup the qualitative findings.

Moreover, for future research other dimensions deserve attention to be explored like personality and how gender identity influences the leadership co-construction in the Ecuadorian air service organization and cultural context.

In general terms, this research was conducted being aware of the limitations. Nonetheless, the purpose was not to make an extensive research that assures the avoidance of limitations, but to provide a study that gives an understanding of this leadership reality in a developing country that has not been studied enough. Therefore, future research is necessary to acquire profound knowledge of this phenomenon.

REFERENCES

Aarons, G. A. (2006). Transformational and transactional leadership: association with attitudes toward evidence-based practice. *Psychiatric Services, 57*(8), 1162-1169.

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology, 63*(1), 1-18.

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive methodology : new vistas for qualitative research* (2 ed.). London: SAGE.

Avery, G. C. (2004). *Understanding Leadership.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2004). *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire: Manual and sampler set* (3 ed.). Mind Garden.

Barnard, C. I. (1938). *Functions of the Executive.* Boston, MA: Business School Press.

Bass, B. M. (1960). *Leadership, psychology, and organizational behavior.* New York: Harper.

Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3 ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Bass, B. M. (1998). *Transformational Leadership: Military and Civilian Impact.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bass, B. M. (1999). Two decades of research and development in transformational leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 8*(1), 9-32.

Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Bass, B. M., & Bass, R. (2008). *The Bass handbook of leadership* (4 ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2 ed.). Psychology Press.

Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., Jung, D. I., & Benson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(2), 207-218.

Bedeian, A. G., & Hunt, J. G. (2006). Academic amnesia and vestigial assumptions of our forefathers. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(2), 190–205.

Bennis, W. G., & Nanus, B. (1985). *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge.* New York: Harper & Row.

Breevaart, K., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & van den Heuvel, M. (2015). Leader-member exchange, work engagement, and job performance. *Journal Of Managerial Psychology, 30*(7), 754-770.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4 ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business Research Methods* (3 ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burns, B. (2009). *Managing Change – A Strategic Approach to Organisational Dynamics* (5 ed.). London: Prentice Hall.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism.* London : Routledge.

Carnall, C. A. (2007). *Managing change in organizations* (5 ed.). New York: Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

Chin-Yi, S. (2015). The Impact of Intrinsic Motivation on The Effectiveness of Leadership Style towards on Work Engagement. *Contemporary Management Research, 11*(4), 327-349.

Choy, J., McCormack, D., & Djurkovic, N. (2016). Leader-member exchange and job performance. *Journal Of Management Development, 35*(1), 104-119.

Dansereau, F., Graen, G. G., & Haga, W. (1975). A Vertical Dyad Linkage Approach to Leadership within Formal Organizations. A Longitudinal Investigation of the Role Making Process. *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance, 13*(1), 46–78.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior.* New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Diefendorff, J. M., Croyle, M. H., & Gosserand, R. H. (2005). The dimensionality and antecedents of emotional labor strategies. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*, 339–357.

Dienesch, R. M., & Liden, R. C. (1986). Leader-Member Exchange Model of Leadership: A Critique and Further Development. *Academy Of Management Review, 11*(3), 618–635.

DuBrin, A. J. (2010). *Principles of leadership* (6 ed.). London: Cengage Learning.

Epitropaki, O., & Martin, R. (2005). From Ideal to Real: A Longitudinal Study of the Role of Implicit Leadership Theories on Leader-Member Exchanges and Employee Outcomes. *Journal Of Applied Psychology, 90*(4), 659-676.

Everett, L. Q. (2016). Academic-Practice Partnerships: The Interdependence Between Leadership and Followership. *Nursing Science Quarterly, 29*(2), 168-172.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Grant, D. (2010). The Social Construction of Leadership: A Sailing Guide. *Management Communication Quarterly, 24*(2), 171-210.

Fiedler, F. (1995). Cognitive resources and leadership performance. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 44*, 5-28.

Gemmel, P., Van Looy, B., & Dierdonck, R. V. (2013). *Service management - an integrated approach.* London: Pearson.

Gill, R. (2006). *Theory and Practice of Leadership.* London: Sage Publications.

Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadership Quarterly, 6*(2), 219-247.

Graen, G., & Cashman, J. (1975). A role-making model of leadership in formal organization: A development approach. (J. G. Hunt, & L. L. Larson, Edits.) *Leadership Frontiers*, 143-165.

Gummesson, E. (2000). *Qualitative methods in management research* (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Hayes, L. A., Caldwell, C., Licona, B., & Meyer, T. E. (2015). Followership behaviors and barriers to wealth creation. *Journal Of Management Development, 34*(3), 270-285.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Cultural Tools - Ecuador.* Retrieved April 23, 2016, from The Hofstede Centre: https://geert-hofstede.com/ecuador.html

Hollander, E. P. (1980). *Leadership and social exchange processes.* New York: Plenum Press.

House, R. J. (1977). A 1976 theory of charismatic leadership. (J. G. Hunt, & L. L. Larson, Edits.) *Leadership: The cutting edge*, 189-207.

Howell, J. P., & Costley, D. L. (2006). *Understanding Behaviors for Effective Leadership* (2 ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Howell, K. (2013). *An introduction to the philosophy of methodology.* London: SAGE.

Huczynski, A. A., & Buchanan, D. (2007). *Organizational behaviour* (6 ed.). Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Ilies, R., Nahrgang, J. D., & Morgeson, F. (2007). Leader-member exchange and citizenship behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92*(1), 269-277.

Jones, G. R., George, J. M., & Hill, C. W. (2000). *Contemporary Management* (2 ed.). Boston, MA, USA: McGraw-Hill.

Jönsson, S. (2005). *Client work, job satisfaction and work environment aspects in human service organizations.* Stockholm: Arbetslivsinstitutet.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal, 33*(4), 692-724.

Kellerman, B. (2007). What Every Leader Needs to Know About Followers. *Harvard Business Review, 85*(12), 84-91.

Kelley, R. E. (1992). *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People want to Follow, and Followers Who Lead Themselves.* New York, NY: Doubleday.

Kotter, J. P. (1990). *A force for change: How leadership differs from management.* New York: Free Press.

Liden, R. C., & Graen, G. (1980). Generalizability of the Vertical Dyad Linkage Model of Leadership. *The Academy of Management Journal*(3), 451.

Lusch, R. F., & Vargo, S. L. (2014). *Service-dominant logic: Premises, perspectives, possibilities.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lussier, R. N., & Achua, C. F. (2007). *Effective Leadership* (3 ed.). Thomson South-Western, OH.

Malhotra, N. K. (2010). *Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation* (6 ed.). London: Pearson Education Cop.

Martz, J. D. (1996). *Ecuador: The Fragility of Dependent Democracy* (4 ed.). (J. W. Howard, & F. K. Harvey, Edits.) Boulder: Westview.

Maslow, A. (1970). *Motivation and personality.* New York: Harper & Row.

May, T. (2011). *Social research, issues, methods and process.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Messick, D. M. (2004). The psychological exchange between leaders and followers. (D. M. Messick, & R. M. Kramer, Edits.) *The psychology of leadership. New perspectives and research*, 81–96.

Northouse, P. G. (2007). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (4 ed.). SAGE Publications Inc.

Pendleton, D., & Furnham, A. (2011). *Leadership: All you need to know all you need to know.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Riggio, R. E., Chaleff, I., & Blumen-Lipman, J. (2008). *The art of followership: How great followers create great leaders and organizations.* San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

Sadler, P. (2003). *Leadership* (2 ed.). London: Kogan Page.

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research.* London: SAGE.

Sinha, C. (2012). Construction of Leadership among School Teachers: Does Social Identity Matters? *Interpersona: An International Journal On Personal Relationships*(1), 40.

Skålén, P. (2010). *Managing service firms: The power of managerial marketing.* New York: Routledge.

Sparrowe, R. T., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Process and Structure in Leader-Member Exchange. *The Academy of Management Review*(2), 522.

Stenbacka, C. (2001). Qualitative research requires quality concepts of its own. *Management Decision, 39*(7), 551-555.

Stogdill, R. M. (1950). Leadership, membership and organization. *Psychological Bulletin, 47*, 1-14.

Stogdill, R. M. (1974). *Handbook of Leadership: A survey of theory and research.* New York: Free Press.

Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: a difference in leader focus. *The Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 25*(4), 349-361.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Trottier, T., Van Wart, M., & Wang, X. (2008). Examining the nature and significance of leadership in government organizations. *Public Administration Review, 68*(2), 319-333.

Vroom, V. H., & Jago, A. G. (1988). *The New Leadership: Managing Participation in Organizations.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Winkler, I. (2009). *Contemporary Leadership Theories: Enhancing the Understanding of the Complexity, Subjectivity and Dynamic of Leadership.* Heidelberg: Physica-Verlag HD.

Yahaya, R., & Ebrahim, F. (2016). Leadership styles and organizational commitment: literature review. *Journal of Management Development, 35*(2), 190-216.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research Design and Methods* (3 ed.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Yin, R. K. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. *Evaluation, 19*(3), 321-332.

Yoder-Wise, P. S. (2011). *Leading and managing in nursing* (5 ed.). St. Louis, MO: Mosby Elsevier.

Yukl, G. (1989). Managerial leadership: A review of theory and research. *Journal of Management, 15*(2), 251-289.

Yukl, G. (1994). *Leadership in organizations.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (8 ed.). Boston: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Yulk, G. A., & Van Fleet, D. (1982). Cross-situational, multi-method research on military leader effectiveness. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 30*(4), 87-108.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE COODINATORS AND SALES AGENTS

Semi-structured interview with 4 participants

1) Background
   a) Age
   b) Education / major
   c) Current position in the company and how many years in this position
   d) How many years in the company and previous positions

2) What do you think about leadership in general terms in this organization?
   a) Do you consider yourself as a leader? Why?

3) Do you think that leadership could be co-constructed between the leader and followers or is a learning process solely performed by the leader? Why?
   a) What are the factors that you identify in this co-construction?

4) Do you identify a leadership co-construction with your current or previous supervisor? How?

5) Do you feel involved in the leadership co-construction within the counter ticket office? How?

6) How do you perceive the leader-follower relationship with your current supervisor and how it was with your previous supervisor?

7) Do you think that the leadership style of the supervisor influences the working atmosphere in general? How does it in your particular case?

8) How do you define the leadership style of your current supervisor?
   a) What does he/she makes, so you can define it like that?

9) How makes you feel the leadership style of your current supervisor and why?

10) How do you define the leadership style of your previous supervisor?
    a) What does he/she makes, so you can define it like that?

11) How makes you feel the leadership style of your previous supervisor and why?

12) Is there any relevant difference between the leadership style of your current and previous supervisors? Which one?

13) In your opinion, the working atmosphere and/or performance of the counter ticket office has changed with the modification of the supervisor? How? Why?

14) If you had the opportunity, what leadership aspect would you like to modify from your current and previous supervisor? Why?

15) Is there anything relevant that you think I have missed?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE SUPERVISORS

Semi-structured interview with 3 participants

1) Background
   a) Age
   b) Education / major
   c) Current position in the company and how many years in this position
   d) How many years in the company and previous positions

2) What do you think about leadership in general terms in this organization?
   a) Do you consider yourself as a leader? Why?

3) Do you think that leadership could be co-constructed between the leader and followers or is a learning process solely performed by the leader? Why?
   a) What are the factors that you identify in this co-construction?

4) Do you perform a leadership co-construction with your followers? How?
   a) Do you think your followers influence the way you behave or lead them?

5) How do you perceive the leader-follower relationship in the counter ticket office?
   a) What are the challenges or difficulties?
   b) What are your feelings from leading a group of people?

6) How do you perceive your leader-follower relationship with your chief?

7) Do you think that your leadership style influences the working atmosphere in general?

8) How do you define the leadership style of your chief?
   a) What does he/she makes, so you can define it like that?

9) Do you think that the leadership style of your chief has influenced in the leadership that you perform with your followers? How? Why?

10) If you had the opportunity, what leadership aspect would you like to modify from your chief? Why?

11) Is there anything relevant that you think I have missed?

APPENDIX C: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

NAME	AGE	GENDER	POSITION	DATE	DURATION
Claudia	31	Female	Supervisor	2016-04-10	63 minutes
Andrew	30	Male	Supervisor	2016-04-08	56 minutes
Paula	36	Female	Supervisor	2016-04-12	46 minutes
Stephanie	34	Female	Coordinator	2016-04-09	68 minutes
Ana	34	Female	Coordinator	2016-04-21	58 minutes
Mia	31	Female	Sales agent	2016-04-10	54 minutes
Tamara	32	Female	Sales agent	2016-04-09	43 minutes

* Due to the anonymity of the participants, the names are not real.

APPENDIX D: COLLECTED DATA

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	STATEMENT	INTERVIEWEE
Leadership in the air service organization		"I believe that in Ecuador there is no culture of developing leadership. In the company there is no much coaching".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"Leadership is what you can represent to the group of people with whom you work and that image that you have and project towards them is the most important. The leader must understand the DNA of each person, understand their development and personality to work with each individually. Leadership comes with the person, but also can be developed".	
		"The airline needs to be more focused in the employees, it focuses a lot on the procedures and reaching the goals. The leaders need to know what happens to the people inside and outside the organization; they do not have enough conversation with the subordinates. With my boss there is no leadership co-construction, but at least I had the opening to tell her the things that I do not like about her way of leading us".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"In the organization we are all evaluated by competencies and goals".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"Leadership is something innate, but it can also be developed. The leader must be flexible, know how to guide a team, listen to the team, lead by example, be self-critical, develop the team so they can empower themselves over their tasks and be self-sufficient".	
		"In the airline my role is to support the supervisor, as coordinator I am a channel between her and the group".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator
		"Leadership focuses in the person. The leader is who organizes, he/she must be a model to lead by example, a motivator to reach the goal and be positive with an open mind. The leader must ensure that the group follows him/her, communicate well to convince the people to achieve the goals".	
		"I think that the airline pursues new trends for continuous improvement, work quality and that the people feel good, but I think there is still missing".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent
		"The leader must be focused on service and his/her team, not only on the administrative tasks".	

		"I think that indistinct of the style, the counter ticket offices work just fine because we are constantly evaluated and measured. I do not think that the different forms of leading affect the performance of the office because then we would have problems, but I do think that it affects the feeling of the agents or the organizational climate".	
		"In the office the leadership is strongly defined, because in the airline we must work hard as a team and the leader must give confidence and guidance to solve situations".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
Factors contributing in the leadership co-construction	Leader's contribution	"Leadership is based on trust, respect, knowing that you can count on each other, a lot of communication, knowledge and self-control. I think the followers have less influence on the leader, but they do it anyway, because the different personalities collaborate in this influence".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"It is vital to have a team that supports, respects, admires and sees in you the opportunity to learn. I like that the people learn, ask, grow and also proactivity is important to distinguished yourself. I am pleased to teach people, I am not selfish with my work. Some important factors could be to apply democracy, that everyone thinks, talks, trusts and to know how to negotiate".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"The leader should be charismatic, creative, get to know to people, be a good communicator, prudent and use positive feedback. Always to consult what can be offered in order to have an optimal performance. You can never be afraid of the leader's reaction, for me that is important".	
		"The team is part of the process, it is important to be self-critical, self-evaluate, innovate, communicate, being empathetic and implement teamwork".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"Leadership skills are developed in courses, team building; based on what the organization really wants, but it also depends on whether the person has an innate leadership, if the person has this innate temperament".	
		"As coordinator I listen the opinion and criteria of my supervisor and my agents. I participate many times in the analysis of the agents because they invite me, since I listen and convey their concerns to our supervisor; information that she would lose if I do not fulfill this role".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator
		"Leader refers to the prepared person who is able to handle, support, understand and has the ability to communicate with the right words without hurting. In the organization you can identify the leaders, because they have the support of many people".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator

		"The leader must be strong and confident, but I cannot take drastic decisions with my team. The coexistence in an airline makes you be friend of your group and friendship complicates making certain decisions. In the evaluations my boss always tells me that is something to be improved".	
		"Leader is not a leader if he/she does not have followers. I think that the important factors are knowledge, to know how to handle, be confident but with flexibility, support, create friendship and trust".	
		"The leader must encourage, motivate, leading by example, create trust, have vision, instill customer service and develop his /her team. It is important to be confident, that is critical in a service organization such as an airline".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent
		"I think that leadership is also provoked by seniority and knowledge; which creates confidence; also communication and openness are important. I think that being at the same level and not setting much hierarchy is important to build leadership among supervisor and agents, but we must set limits and respect, otherwise the agents might believe that all is about friendship and do not follow instructions for believing that nothing bad will happen to them".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
		"To be a leader you must have followers and leadership is more than just innate ability, you must have opinions, show points of view, take ideas together for proper feedback and grow as a group. The leader also grows depending on the followers he/she has, nothing succeeds if there is no credibility".	
	Follower's contribution	"The agents have contributed with networking, interest on learning, are assertive with me and I have learned to be assertive and patient".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"As follower I have been teaching and explaining to my boss the activities I do with my team and the results I have obtained, so she has been absorbing knowledge and skills. With me my boss has learned to behave, being assertive and empathetic".	
		"I am always in communication with my boss about the results and progress of the office and I make her know as soon as possible, as a kind of feedback and now she does similarly. Any bad news must include with a proposed solution".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"Leadership is an exchange, because the leader does not exist if he/she does not have a group to whom designate tasks. The team also offers and supports with situations where the leader sometimes knows only the theory, whereas the agents know and live the proceedings. The agent has the important role of feeding information and thus contributes to the whole group development".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator

		"The agents provide many ideas that the supervisor and I do not have and listening is important, we must understand that we must help each other. The interaction with the passengers is often complicated, the least you want is a complicated atmosphere inside the office too".	
		"It is important that the agents are comprehensive; which generates fellowship and union".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator
		"I think that the agent is able to facilitate the leader's work, but the leader must know how to empower each agent, so they can distinguished themselves and exit their comfort zone. It is very important to communicate and create a close relationship where work and personal issues are addressed; which motivates and builds commitment".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent
Leader-follower involvement	Regular involvement	"I tried to know the agents with one-to-one meetings and doing activities so they can know and interact among each other. In the meetings I asked what they expected from me and I also told them what I expected from them. The different activities caused involvement within the team. It is nice to feel that your team works with you to make you feel good, because I work to make them feel good too. There is constant support and now the agents even correct each other to help themselves grow".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"We do meetings on how to improve the office quality, where a person is empowered to give ideas that provide results. The ideas are analyzed together and action plans are established. Every analysis is done together, trying to understand every situation".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"We are evaluated individually and as a group. I receive congratulations because I adapt easily and have good dynamics with the group, but I am criticized for being informal with the agents. With the agents you cannot be so formal, because you do not get to them. I had to involve myself as a friend, to be close, empathetic; otherwise they do not listen to you".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator
		"There are no evaluations in which the agents qualify us, but I do consult them about how they think I do my work and how could I improve it. It is important to know and understand their opinion, especially because they are all women and it is difficult to work with a mostly female group, although I am a woman. They are very sensitive".	
		"I feel involved because I work a lot as a team with my supervisor. I help her with ideas to find solutions. For the new supervisor I was a great support to help her know the agents, to know how to work with them. The supervisor has also supported me a lot to make me feel involved with my work and make the team count on me, the meetings and activities have contributed a lot".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator

		"The agents are active, they give their own ideas, plans and it is because they have been heard and are autonomous to work. The dynamics served to make them understand that we are not to give orders, but to work as a team".	
		"I contribute with ideas, in certain procedures I am the one who says which are the best ways to do it. I always inform my coordinator; the communication with her is very good and that is important. We analyze things together and then I give the information to my colleagues and the coordinator does it to the supervisor. It is motivating that the coordinator does not take credit, but she recognizes it in front of my peers and my supervisor. I think we both are growing, as well as the office".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
		"At the beginning it was difficult to get involved with the supervisor, she was directly promoted from sales agent to supervisor and it was hard for everyone to be adapted, everything was arbitrary and I think she had not managed groups before. We have similar personalities and maybe that helped us to communicate better and now she asks my opinion and I even stay in charge of the office on weekends when there is no supervisor and coordinator, they trust on me. I feel good because they count on me and my contributions have been valued, in the evaluations I have been well too. At the end we are all a team and actually my success will be their success too".	
	Non-involvement	"My boss is missing involvement, sharing, participating and actively listening to her team. She should be involved, she should separate her administrative tasks from the operational ones. She does not know her team".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"When I got to this office I began to ask questions about working modes, what they do and you realize that there are things not implemented, so the initiatives start to be created".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"I perform different types of evaluations; anonymous one where I am evaluated by my team and 360 where I listen suggestions and I am self-critical about what to improve. If you have a good score you will be considered a leader, otherwise you are only a boss giving orders. The leader must know how to delegate functions".	
		"I feel that I influence on my supervisor, I think my personality is of a leader. My current supervisor is new and she asks me for a lot of support, a lot of advice, sometimes even I am the one who makes decisions, but avoiding the invasion of her role. I have many ideas, but a bit difficult to perform them. I do not feel a leadership co-construction with my supervisor".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent

Leader-follower relationship	High-exchange relationship	"My leader-follower relationship with my team is quite constructive, I think it is because we have known each other little by little. It is based on respect, tolerance, trust and humility. It has also been important to apply positive feedback with them. At the beginning the relationship was very bad, so I did some activities that created a sense of belonging in the group. Now the relationship is a little paternalistic, but in that way it is easier to detect errors".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"With my team it has been a democratic relationship where it counts the opinion of everyone to make decisions. We talk a lot about professional and personal issues; there is mutual interest".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"The relationship with my boss is currently quite good. Initially I was afraid to make proposals or disagreeing, my fear was because of her possible reaction. Through time we have learned to communicate better and the relationship is now very good, it is flexible and she supports me".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"Currently the relationship is positive, I have freedom to express my point of view. Now she listens and I perceive that she analyzes what she hears, but one drawback has been that the airline must meet many procedures and goals; everything is rigorous".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator
		"The relationship improved because in the type of work that we have there is much coexistence, familiarity is created due to the large number of hours that you spend with the group, you talk about work and personal issues which help you to empathize. At the beginning it was not a relationship but an imposition and it did not work, the coexistence improved it and now there is an exchange and empathy".	
		"With my previous supervisor the relationship was empathic from the beginning, perhaps because of the personalities; it was much more open and frontal, without filters. I talked to her without fear or shame; there was a lot of communication. She involved me and counted a lot with me, I liked that because I felt important and valued. She was very proactive and taught me everything".	
		"With my current supervisor I feel more confident, she has helped me a lot to make the team understand that I am also in charge of them. She has given me confidence, security, I feel more connected to the team, everything is transparent, and she has empowered me in my role as coordinator. We have different personalities, but I think it has been good for the balance of the team".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator
		"With my previous supervisor the relationship was better, maybe because we are very similar then we had things in common. I was very surprised that she was very understanding about family problems, even though she is single with no children; I think that makes you gain confidence and motivates you to improve. She made me feel important and motivated".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent

		"I have a very good relationship with the coordinator and it is reciprocal, we have confidence. The coordinator thinks different from the boss. The coordinator is close to us; she gives us openness and trust. She is our friend".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
		"At the beginning the supervisor had no experience and did not know how to relate with the agents, her attitude was annoying and caused problems, but she has improved a lot and many agents feel more confident to talk to her, mainly about professional issues. There is not the same confidence as with the coordinator, because I consider her a friend and the supervisor is my colleague with whom I have a good work relationship".	
		"I think that the supervisor has a special consideration with me because she trusts on me and that creates a good working relationship among us. Basically I think it is because I do my job well, I receive congratulations from other areas and it is rare that I make mistakes in my work".	
	Low-exchange relationship	"My leader-follower relationship with my boss is pretty tough, we have very similar personalities. I never say what she does wrong, but how I feel in the way she does it. Through feeling I show or make her understand how I feel and how is our working relationship".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"With my boss is a suffocating relationship and she does not focus on you as a person".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"The relationship with my team is very cordial, in some cases there is camaraderie, but always with respect. I think I am seen as a person that people can communicate without any problems. I try to collaborate them on things that are under my control, without neglecting labor issues".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"The relationship with my previous supervisor was different, he did not make the team to notice that I was also in charge of the office, the agents solved everything directly with him, there was no respect and no good circuit for performing the tasks. We had very similar personalities, we both were very soft and there was no balance".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator
		"I feel disconnected with my current supervisor, she is not focused on leadership. There is a lack of connection, I feel that she is very focused on administrative tasks, perhaps because she is pregnant. It is a very superficial relationship, there is no much understanding among us, we are different in the way we make decisions. I do not feel supported and fond to her".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent
		"The boss does not like that the supervisors and coordinators become too close with the agents".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent

Leader's influence	Idealized influence	"The leader does influence the team, the agents absorb certain characteristics and I see it as a normal process, for me the influence is related to the personality and assertiveness of the leader. At the beginning I was very inflexible, very strict and structured because my boss is like that, but I realized that I had to change with my team, because we were not achieving the goals".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"The leader influences in most of the people. It is gratifying that they strive to implement improvements and do something without being asked. It is difficult to influence people who have no interest in their work and development. You generate influence updating knowledge, teaching how to make a presentation, how to structure an e-mail and now they all do very well".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"The leader influences, if he/she is very strict or not so friendly the goals can be achieved but maybe in a longer period of time because there could be resistance from the group; whereas if he/she is empathetic the goals are achieved faster because the agents find the way to sell for helping their leader".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator
		"Yes indeed, the leader influences. My current supervisor has generated respect, the group works better, much has changed in the office. We all feel supported, capable to make decisions with confidence. The atmosphere has changed, everyone likes to have openness, and everyone contributes".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator
		"I think that my performance has been influenced by my supervisor, because she invites you to participate. For example, if there is a new procedure she motivates you to check and expose it to the group, to make it clear. In my case she influences me to grow professionally, studying a master program or something else. She has supported me a lot".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
	Non-idealized influence	"I think my boss has influenced on me to do the opposite of what she does, she has shown me things I do not want to adopt, she has not influenced my style, but in how I build my leadership. It is easier to know what you do not want, rather than what you really want".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"The leader does influence the group. Recently there was a change of supervisor in the office and it was felt, because the new supervisor is much strict, I even know that the atmosphere ceased to be nice, but you have to adapt yourself".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"In my case my boss influenced me to behave different from her".	
		"The previous supervisor did not have the initiative to generate the same openness and the team had no desire to work".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator

		"Totally the leader influences. His/her style influences the agents to want to work with willingness and creates confidence. The change of supervisor modified the environment or connection, but the relationship between the agents is still good, maybe because we are few and we know each other for a long time".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent
Leader's profile	Coordinators	"My coordinator is very relaxed and her style is to get along with everyone, as friends and be close. She always communicates everything and you feel her part of your team, it seems that she is on the same side that the agents and that creates a lot of confidence. She is more people oriented, her priority is the team and then the airline".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
		"The other coordinator is much more reserved, I do not consider him a leader. He is good at knowledge and methodical, but does not have the attitude of a leader. He is very quiet, disengaged, he only says what people ask him and does not share his knowledge. As agents we can try to influence him and in fact we invite him to participate and share his knowledge, but you cannot do much if you do not have the attitude. He is not very active and I think that is an important quality of a leader, for me a leader has to be brilliant".	
	Supervisors	"At the beginning my current supervisor was authoritarian and very rigid. She was a chief giving orders, instilling fear to achieve goals and contacting us in a bad manner. She managed to understand that she needs to join her group, to know what is wrong, to listen and to remain silent when it is necessary, to understand that she also needs our support, because on us she looks for information and backup. However, sometimes she leaves us alone, she should be more involved".	(Stephanie, 2016) Coordinator
		"My previous supervisor was very sincere and not everyone took it in the best way. Most of us were women so there was a lot of sensitivity in the group, which sometimes is inconvenient. She is a very emotional person, thoughtful and effusive to communicate; she could be negatively emotional or she could make you feel the best person in the world".	
		"My current supervisor is a leader, she has a great potential. She likes helping, listening, supporting, understanding and is flexible with the processes; without doing wrong things. She tries to find the way to give calm to the team, not to have problems and achieves the empathy of the agents. She makes everyone understand that they have her support and she also hopes that everyone supports her".	(Ana, 2016) Coordinator
		"The other supervisor was straight, strict, always following procedures and not so permissive. I think he was afraid to make decisions that could affect his supervisor role and he was not a person who takes risks for his team. I do not consider him a leader, but a boss".	

		"The current supervisor is more like a boss who makes you work regardless of whether you have personal problems. It is difficult for her to understand that the family is priority and you cannot work well if you have issues in your personal life. She imposes, is not empathetic, sets a lot of hierarchy, does not know how to handle personal situations and makes you feel silly when you make a mistake".	(Tamara, 2016) Sales agent
		"The previous supervisor is a leader who can recognize her mistakes, apologize and try to find solutions. She always tried to involve the whole team, constantly seeking to improve and we liked that. She established goals for us and made us study hard things from work, so she prepared us for different tasks. She never made us feel silly when we made a mistake".	
		"My supervisor gives importance to the important things and is rigid in what must be rigid. She is not based on established processes or policies, she goes beyond that. With her new attitude now there is a more relaxed atmosphere and she creates more participation from everyone".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent
	Middle manager	"My boss has moments of leadership and others of boss. She has grown in the old school and has struggled to learn to lead. Her personality is stronger than her skills and she does not like to lose or feel that is losing control of the situation, for that reason sometimes she takes tough decisions without being equitable".	(Claudia, 2016) Supervisor
		"In my opinion she is a boss, she is not a person of results, but a person who is constantly monitoring. Every time is not about how you want to do things, but how she wants you to do it. I also do not like that she does the admonitions in front of other people, whereas the congratulations are few and only by e-mail, although she copies everyone involved. She is not a good communicator, is impertinent, does not use the proper tone, there is no empowerment, minimizes our hierarchy and does not like us to apply for other positions".	(Paula, 2016) Supervisor
		"Now I consider my boss as a leader. She is dominant, not so flexible and she does not let emotions affect her. For her it is important a follower who contributes with ideas, takes active participation, and gives argumentative proposals. She is interested in promoting, but many things are beyond her reach. One must know how to communicate with her, otherwise she can have unexpected reactions and always expects to hear solutions to problems".	(Andrew, 2016) Supervisor
		"I consider my supervisor and coordinator as leaders, but their chief is a boss and not a leader. She does not reach the people, is not communicative, is imposed, is not affective, there is no trust and there is no opening. I think she has reached that position for her experience and seniority and not for leadership. She has had many problems with her people in charge".	(Mia, 2016) Sales agent