

Can design thinking support the development of leadership?

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Abstract

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Title:	Can design thinking support the development of leadership?
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Summary:	<p>The digitalization of the society, which is often seen as an essential factor of the fourth industrial revolution, is impacting everything and everyone. This digital revolution puts high demands on many companies and organisations today. This requires a strong leadership within the organisations in order to keep up. Today many organisations invest in formal leadership development programs to support their leaders and managers.</p> <p>In times of change there is a need for new ways of solving challenges and design thinking, which is a human centred approach to finding the best ideas and solutions, is one such innovative approach.</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis is to describe, and analyse whether design thinking, or parts of design thinking, today are used in the creation of formal leadership development.</p> <p>The research is performed via a qualitative study involving six different companies. The research questions used are: <i>What is design thinking? How is formal leadership development conducted and followed up today? And How can design thinking influence how formal leadership development is conducted?</i></p> <p>The result shows that parts of design thinking are used in the development of formal leadership programs but primarily unconsciously. It would be interesting to see how the quality of formal leadership development programs would be impacted by a more conscious and thorough use of design thinking.</p>
Key words:	Leadership, Design thinking, Leadership development

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1. Introduction

The introduction introduces the reader to the chosen subject, the chosen research method and it clarifies also why it is interesting to research this subject. Further the limitations of this thesis are clarified as well as its pedagogical relevance and previous research. In the end of the introduction is an explanation for the chosen disposition.

Virtually every single business realm in the Western world is beginning to transform from an old economic order into a new reality. The digitization of society and the economy has, of course, an impact on everything and everyone (Jongen, 2018).

Digitalization is often seen as an essential factor in the 4th industrial revolution (World Economic Forum 2016b) and being such a factor, it has been powerful enough to have implications on current and future leadership practices. The digital revolution is changing the work environment because it has made information abundant, available, and less costly (Jakubik & Berazhny, 2017). This rapid development puts high demands on many companies and organizations today. Cacioppe discussed already in 1998 that the world and business are changing fast and when change occurs, leadership is needed (Cacioppe, 1998). To improve leadership skills many organizations run leadership development programs. One of the biggest criticisms of many of those, is that they do not contribute to the business objectives of the organisation. They may develop managerial skills, but they do not substantially contribute to business success (Ibid.).

This criticism towards leadership development programs in general is also expressed by Gurdjian, Halbeisen, and Lane (2014) who states that "... many training initiatives we come across rest on the assumption that one size fits all and that the same group of skills or style of leadership is appropriate regardless of strategy, organizational culture, or CEO mandate" (Gurdjian, Halbeisen & Lane, 2014, p 2).

In times of change new ways of development is tested. Brown (2008) means that we are in an era where the need for transformation is greater than ever before, and the same is valid for finding innovative solutions to solve problems in both health care, educational systems and private companies. All these problems have people at their heart, and they require a human-centred, creative, iterative and practical approach to finding the best ideas and solutions. Design thinking is just such an approach to innovation (Brown 2008). Bersin et. al argues that "Design thinking moves HR's focus beyond building programs and processes to a new goal: designing a productive and meaningful employee experience through solutions that are compelling, enjoyable, and simple" (Bersin, Solow & Wakefield, 2016, p 1)

I believe that it is in times of change, that leadership becomes even more important. This is something I have experienced myself working as HR manager for an organisation and that is why I have decided to look further into this topic.

This thesis is covering the definition of leadership, formal leadership development and if, and how, a modern approach, like design thinking, could potentially improve the way formal leadership development trainings are developed. With the rapid development happening in the world, and the increasing expectations on the leaders and managers in many organisations, I believe that there is also an urgent need to advance the ways formal leadership development is designed and conducted.

The research is done in a qualitative way, where HR managers and Talent managers in six companies have been interviewed about how they perceive that their company is managing formal leadership development trainings. The qualitative approach is chosen to get a deeper understanding of the respondents view on this phenomenon. You will find more detailed information about the chosen method, the chosen respondents etc. in chapter 3.

1.1 Problem area

With above as a base I am curious of how formal leadership development is conducted today, and the importance companies involved in this research place on it.

I am also very interested if and how new approaches, like human centred design principles such as design thinking, can influence the way formal leadership development is developed and conducted.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to describe, and analyse whether design thinking, or parts of design thinking, today are used in the creation of formal leadership development.

1.3 Research questions

In order to clarify the purpose further and to support the research in this thesis the following research questions have been developed:

- What is design thinking?
- How is formal leadership development conducted and followed up today?
- How can design thinking influence how formal leadership development is conducted?

1.4 Limitations

Due to time limitations of this thesis only 6 companies have been interviewed in this research. The result given from these interviews feels sufficient, but it is not possible to exclude that a broader population of interviews would result in a broader, and maybe slightly different result. All interviews were conducted with HR managers or Talent managers (responsible for leadership development) in the selected companies. This is the chosen approach for this research even though it would give additional perspectives to also interview the leaders and managers attending formal leadership development programs. One additional and interesting perspective would also be to interview employees of managers attending formal leadership development programs, but this is not in scope for this thesis.

Another limitation is that this thesis is only focusing on formal leadership development (i.e. planned and executed activities/trainings to further develop the leadership among the participants). This means that the leadership development that happens in the daily business, by for example trial and error from the leader or manager, is not considered.

1.5 Pedagogical relevance

This thesis is written as part of the course PEDK21, *Working life education*. The core areas of this thesis are: *Leadership, formal leadership development* and *design thinking*.

The pedagogical relevance is deemed to be strong since leadership is fundamental in the working life, and how to develop leadership skills is very tightly connected to pedagogy and education.

Design thinking is an approach to develop both products and services (such as trainings) which means that the pedagogical relevance is strong to this topic as well.

1.6 Previous research

There is a vast amount of previous research on *leadership*. It is possible to find a wide variety of definitions of what leadership actually is, and also what importance it has for an organisation. The situation is more or less the same when it comes to *leadership development*. Bolden (2005) summarizes it by saying that there is still a lot that is highly contentious when it comes to leadership studies and leadership development. He continues by expressing that the central arguments about leadership development is whether you can train or develop leaders at all. "Early theories of leadership proposed that great leaders emerged because of an innate combination of ability and personal characteristics (i.e. a belief that leaders were 'born not made')." (Bolden, 2005, p 3). More recent research has questioned this view and argues that leadership skills and behaviours can be developed over time. The current popular view is probably somewhere in between, where many leadership qualities e.g. communication skills, strategic thinking and self-awareness can be developed while more personal characteristics e.g. dominance and social ability are much harder to develop. These more personal characteristics will influence which leadership style that will be adopted (Ibid.).

Design thinking as an approach or process has also been researched during the past years. A lot of the research around design thinking is primarily, but not exclusively, linked to how it can be used in innovation processes. Brown (2008) means that we are in an era where the need for transformation is greater than ever before. And the same is valid for finding innovative solutions to solve problems in both health care, educational systems and private companies. All these problems have people at their heart, and they require a human-centred, creative, iterative and practical approach to finding the best ideas and solutions. Design thinking is just such an approach to innovation (Brown 2008).

It is not easy to find research that connects the three core areas of this thesis, i.e. *leadership, formal leadership development* and *design thinking*. When searching on combinations of these words most research found is relating to how design thinking can be used as a leadership practise rather than as a tool for designing effective formal leadership development trainings e.g. design thinking is a process that can be used as a part of a leaders' practice, but like for all other leadership tools it is not necessary to use this process for every decision, challenge or circumstance. It is rather recommended to

use this process for problems that are more complex (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2017, 2018).

1.7 The disposition

The ambition with this sub chapter is to support the reader by briefly describing the disposition of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is the theoretical chapter and it is structured around the core areas of Leadership, Leadership development and Design thinking. This chapter intends to define the three core areas and present the theories this thesis is built upon. These theories are also used in the chapters covering the analysis and the discussion.

Chapter 3 is describing the used method for the empirical studies, and why certain decisions in the research work has been taken.

Chapter 4 is covering both the result and the analysis. This chapter is divided into four sub chapters based on the number of identified categories in the analysis of the empirical data. For each category, I have chosen to first present the result and then the analysis of that category before moving to the next. My ambition is that this will be easier to follow than if the complete result would be presented first, and then the complete analysis after that.

Chapter 5 is used for a discussion about the outcome from the result and analysis presented in chapter 4. This chapter also covers a discussion about the choice of method, ideas for further research and finally some concluding remarks.

All chapters will start with a few sentences in italic that describes the purpose and content of the chapter. This in order to support the reader.

2. Theory

The theory chapter starts with a short summary of how the chosen literature have been identified, and there is also a section about source criticism. The rest of the theory chapter is divided into three main areas covering the three fundamentals of this thesis, i.e. Leadership, Leadership development and Design thinking. The intention is to anchor the fundamentals in the theory before we start to look into the empirical research.

2.1 Search of relevant literature and selected literature

The last years there has been a major development when it comes to the easiness of finding literature. Today you can easily search for relevant literature from almost any connected device. Not many years ago Kvale (1997) summarized that in research context all printed material, such as books, articles, reports and thesis are known as literature, and when you start to look for literature it is suitable to start to look in databases of the libraries (Kvale, 1997). Kvaless statement is still half valid since the databases available through the e.g. university libraries offer additional opportunities to access more databases than what you normally can access. These databases can however also be accessed via a member login.

The literature search in this thesis has primarily been done via two approaches.

1) Literature search in known databases such as Emerald, Google Scholar, ERIC etc. In this approach the search has been done with different relevant search words. These search words have been carefully thought through since these words, of course, will reflect the shown literature which also will reflect the whole thesis. The search terms used have for example been Leadership, Design thinking and Leadership development, but also different combinations of these words and others like design thinking plus development, design thinking plus HR, what is leadership etc.

2) Literature search based upon interesting theory identified in thesis and articles relevant for the topic. This approach is more built upon that when you read identified literature then you automatically get tips about additional sources via their references (Ejvegård, 1993). This approach has identified many of the sources used in this thesis.

A big part of the used literature is articles and reports, and only to a minor part is the literature used printed books. This was not an intended strategy when the work started but in the search phase, which actually went on during the whole process in iterations, it turned out that a lot of interesting material was available via articles and reports.

The ambition with the theory chapter is to explain the three fundamentals of this thesis (*leadership, formal leadership development and design thinking*) but more important relate them to each other and avoid to present all literature found on a specific theme which could mean that the thesis “only becomes a more or less shallow inventory of literature, in the literal sense, a review of literature” (Backman, 2016, p 75).

2.2 Source criticism

It is always important to evaluate facts and literature in a critical manner, and when writing a thesis in a university it is of course crucial. This has been a guiding star in this work and therefore the ambition has been to use as many *primary sources* as possible,

but it must be said that all sources were not possible to find and then a few *secondary sources* have been used. But in these cases, they have been reviewed carefully.

It is also important to state that the vast amount of available literature connected to primary leadership is a hurdle. When searching for areas like leadership you get so many hits that you do not see the forest for the trees. In these cases, it is almost possible to find anything you want on the topic, and then the value can feel diluted.

It has, on the opposite, not been easy to find literature on the theme of using design thinking in leadership development. This combination is not so explored in research which is also mentioned in chapter 1.6, Previous research.

The chosen literature is a mix of older sources and more recent sources. The recent sources are primarily articles covering the relevant topics. It could be questioned if the older literature adds value in this type of thesis, but it is a conscious choice to also include older literature to get a good balance of recent and more mature research.

2.2 Leadership

Since this thesis is focusing on analysing the possibilities to develop leadership with support from the ideas originating from design thinking it is important to first define leadership. But that is a challenge. The English word *Leader* is more than a thousand years old and means that you lead humans on a trip (Bolman & Deal, 1995). One of the pioneers within leadership research, Yukl (2002), explains that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have tried to define what it is. Yukl (2002) expresses further that the leader should prepare new ways of development, reduce the employees' uneasiness and instead realize the company's ambitions and goals. In this sense Leadership, according to Yukl, is a process to impact other individuals or groups to act in line with set goals.

Gint (2004) states that it is quite unlikely that there ever will be consensus around one definition of leadership. He identifies a few reasons for this view:

A) The *process problem*, i.e. a lack of agreement on whether leadership comes from personal traits of character, or whether the leader induces followership through what he/she does, i.e. a social process.

B) The *position problem*, i.e. is the leader in charge due to formally allocated authority and mandate or due to informal influence?

C) The *philosophy problem*, i.e. is the leader exerting an intentional and causal influence of the behaviour of his/her followers or are their actions rather determined by the context and situation or are they even attributed respectively?

D) The *purity problem*, i.e. is leadership embodied in individuals and is it then a purely human phenomenon?

Some definitions of leadership restrict it to purely non forced influence towards shared and socially accepted objectives. With this definition persons like Hitler, Stalin and Saddam Hussein would not be seen as leaders but rather tyrants working solely for their own benefit. (Bolden, 2004)

The reason for the introduction of this chapter is to visualize the complexity in defining leadership. And since there are so many broadly different definitions of Leadership,

there is a need to define what leadership means in this thesis, and the chosen definition comes from Kevin Kruse (2013). According to him “Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal” (Kruse, 2013, p3). The key elements for this definition are:

- “Leadership stems from social influence, not authority or power
- Leadership requires others, and that implies they don’t need to be “direct reports”
- No mention of personality traits, attributes, or even a title; there are many styles, many paths, to effective leadership
- It includes a goal, not influence with no intended outcome (Kruse, 2013, p3)

For the purpose of this thesis it is also important to understand how leadership has developed during the last century. The perception of what leadership is, and what its roles and tasks are, has varied a lot during the years. In the 1930s leadership was based on order control, in the 1940s to 1960s it focused on steering systems and rules, in the 1970s and 1980s it shifted more to steering towards goals and results and from 1990 and onwards it focusses more on co steering and leading (Their, 1997). The reason for this development is primarily connected to the social, economic and technological development in the society with a more knowledge intense industry and a more and more challenging global competition. (Sandberg & Targama, 1998)

One consequence, according to Sandberg & Targama (1998) of this development is changed organizational structures which gives the individual more freedom and autonomy in their work. This also means that the leadership must change from detail steering to be more dependent upon the ability to influence humans understanding of where you are heading. The understanding is the base for how the work force act in an organization, and the leaders try to use their ideas and visions to lead their people.

These changes bring forward the need for a more creative leadership, the need for connecting with others, and the need for social intelligence, soft skills, empathy, passion, open mindedness, creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. (Clerkin, 2015).

2.3 Leadership development

This chapter will focus on how to work with formal leadership development. It will start with a broader view on competence development in general before it is zooming in on the development of leadership competence. It will also describe one model for how to work with formal leadership development.

2.3.1 Competence development in general

The word competence development was earlier known as *work force development* and contain important aspects within competence investments, learning and training at work. Competence development at work is a way to develop and retain knowledge and competence in the work force, and this is an important way of developing the organisation as well as the employees. This is also a way of making sure that the work force could change and further develop their competences and be more involved in the demands and goals of the organisation (Ellstrom, 2002).

Normally, learning is mainly associated with formal learnings, like courses or formal education in schools. (Hager, 2001) In the work place formal learning occurs in terms of education and courses, though primarily when there is a need and availability. (Eraut, 2007) In the informal way of learning adults will construct knowledge themselves based on the context they are in (Granberg, 2014). Tews, Noe, Scheurer and Michel (2016) describes informal learning as important and of practical significance for the organisation. The work place of today requires high performing and creative employees (which of course includes leaders) and in this environment informal learning is seen as very positive for the organization's development.

As mentioned in chapter 1.4 Limitations, this thesis is focusing on the formal learnings around leadership even though it is recognized that also the informal learnings play an important role in the further development of a leader.

2.3.2 Competence development focusing on leadership

As previously mentioned, the requirements of the leaders of today, and tomorrow, have changed. This calls for investments in the leadership of the managers and leaders in the workplace. A recent survey involving 5,561 executives from 109 countries identified the improvement of leadership development as the most important human resources priority for organisations around the world (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). One possible explanation to this result is the statement from Pfeffer (2016) where he claims that there is all-too-frequent leadership failures across professional domains. Even though this could be a very harsh statement it is emphasized by the fact that there is an increasing interest in leadership development, for example due to the rapid change in business, technology, global communication and in human values. The world and business is changing fast and when change occurs, leadership is needed (Cacioppe, 1998).

Kotter (1990) underlines the same skills when he states that leadership involves the creation of a vision and strategic direction for the organisation. The communication of that vision to the people and customers of the organisation and this also involves inspiring, motivating and aligning the people, the leadership and the organization to achieve this vision.

The importance of the mentioned type of leadership, i.e. a communicative and involving leadership is also proven in research to have positive impact on, among other things:

- The confidence for the management of the organisation
- Motivation
- Attrition rate
- Sick leave
- A common vision
- Engagement
- The willingness to change (Johansson, 2013)

Finally, Conger & Fulmer (2003) bring yet another important perspective when asking what could be more crucial to an organisations performance than to find and develop its future leaders. Their reasoning is about not only focusing on the leaders of today but

also to invest in the leaders of tomorrow, even if these persons are not yet in a leadership position.

2.3.3 How to work with leadership development

The previous sections have explained the importance of focusing on continuous competence development, and not least when it comes to leadership. Today there is a wide variety of approaches to leadership development. Each organisation, human resource professional, academic and consultant has their own preferred approach to leadership development. There has been little research to demonstrate which approaches that are effective (Conger, 1992). It is however continuously shown, in more than 30 development programs run by Curtin University, that those activities that contributes to improved self-understanding is highly appreciated. The improved self-understanding is achieved by giving participants time to reflect and to assimilate their learning to their own world and work at home (Cacioppe, 1998)

There are different models for how to design an efficient competence development program focusing on leadership. And it is important for the continuation of this thesis to understand this process, and the considerations it contains. Below is a description of a model created by Vicere (1997). This seven-step model is commonly referred to when it comes to designing leadership development programs. The seven steps are:

1. Articulate strategic imperatives
2. Set objectives for development
3. Identify appropriate methods and approaches
4. Select providers and design learning programs
5. Evaluation of program delivery and effectiveness
6. Integrate with human resource systems
7. Evaluation of strategic imperatives, objectives & HR systems

Below I will describe these steps more in detail.

2.3.3.1 Articulate strategic imperatives

This step includes setting the vision and strategy of the organisation and the external and internal factors that drive the decisions of the organisation (e.g. changing market share, return on capital, lack of human resource skills in a particular area, etc.). One of the biggest criticisms of many management development programs is that they do not contribute to the business objectives of the organisation. They may develop managerial skills, but they do not substantially contribute to business success (Cacioppe, 1998).

This criticism towards leadership development programs in general is also expressed by Gurdjian, Halbeisen, and Lane (2014) who states that "... many training initiatives we come across rest on the assumption that one size fits all and that the same group of skills or style of leadership is appropriate regardless of strategy, organizational culture, or CEO mandate" (Gurdjian, Halbeisen & Lane, 2014, p 2).

2.3.3.2 Set objectives for development

The next step according to this model is to set the main purpose and objectives of the leadership development program. It is also important to define what specific knowledge and skills that should be developed by the completion of the program. The experience level, current challenges faced and demographic background, among other things, should be reflected in regards of the participants needs. This should be considered when setting the objectives so that the program is made relevant to the participant as well as the organisation.

Specific training needs, which are linked to the strategic objectives and competences needed for organisational success, may be carried out at this time. Often training needs are carried out independently of strategic imperatives or are linked to a competency model that is separate from the key strategic needs of the firm. (Cacioppe, 1998).

Nabi et al. (2017) states that the first step in designing an efficient leadership program is to determine the desired outcomes post the program on both individual, team and organisational level. These outcomes can preferably be categorized according to the Kirkpatrick model (see more information in chapter 2.3.3.5) where you e.g. can differ between individual and organisational outcomes. This evaluation can

“involve input from various stakeholders, including the participants themselves, in line with the self-direction principle of adult learning. These can also reflect the results of an organisational needs assessment, the organisational leadership doctrine, and can be aligned with the overall organisational strategy.” (Geerts, 2018, p 246)

2.3.3.3 Identify appropriate methods and approaches

In this step it is normally the professionals within Human Resources inside the company, potentially in cooperation with external consultants, who sets the content, method and timing of the program. Various approaches like case studies, team building sessions, project work is considered as possible ways to deliver the objectives. This can also include follow-up or on-the-job assignments to ensure that the competencies are transferred and utilised back in the workplace. (Cacioppe, 1998).

According to Geerts (2018) it is important to have the participants' managers or supervisors involved in this process, i.e. they should agree to reasonable goals for the program which makes it more likely that they will provide the necessary support and resources to attain them successfully. To conduct an assessment or inventory of possible barriers can be helpful to trouble shoot issues before the program starts.

2.3.3.4 Select providers and design learning programs

In this step the focus is on selecting providers and the actual design of the program. A specific relationship is developed with a university, a management institute or some type of a consulting organisation to complete the design and deliver the program. Normally at this point in time specific content are worked out, the timing of the program is set, and other details of the program is materialized. (Cacioppe, 1998).

When it comes to the detailed planning of the program the companies face a delicate balancing act. There is clearly a value in offsite programs that offer participants time to step back and escape the daily business. On the other hand, it is known that adults, even after very basic training sessions, typically retain just 10% of what they hear in the classroom lectures. This should be compared with the two thirds that are retained when they learn by doing. This means that the leaders often struggle to transfer even their most powerful off-site experiences into changed behaviour on the front line. It sound obvious

that leadership programs should be tied to real on the job projects that have business impact in order to maximize learnings, but it is not always so easy to find these opportunities that simultaneously address high priority needs and at the same time offer great conditions for learning (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, and Lane, 2014).

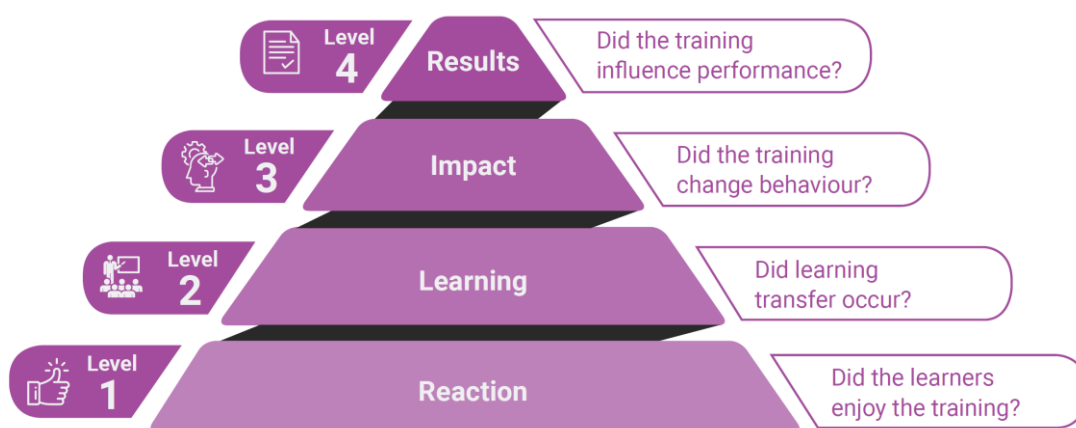
2.3.3.5 Evaluation of program delivery and effectiveness

All of the above-mentioned steps needs to be evaluated to ensure that they deliver the intended value. The first step of evaluation examines the program content and its activities to ensure they lead to the competencies they have been designed for.

And the “Kirkpatrick Model is probably the best-known model for analysing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs.” (Kurt, 2016, p 1)

This model involves:

- Level 1, Reaction/satisfaction – how happy or dissatisfied were the participants with the training or educational program? What is their own evaluation of if the objectives were met, if the presenters were effective, etc.? This is usually assessed by evaluation questionnaires after a training session.
- Level 2, Learning/knowledge – what was actually learned, i.e. what specific knowledge or skills were gained? This can be evaluated in many different ways, e.g. tests, quiz or even a practical exercise that requires certain knowledge or skills to be demonstrated.
- Level 3, Behaviour – this level requires changes in behaviour and/or improvement in skills. This is assessed via observations and/reports from other stakeholders. Alternatively, it could be assessed by a participant accomplish a task that he/she was not able to conduct before.
- Level 4, Results – this level means that the new knowledge, skills and behaviours lead to actual results that improves the operation of the person, team or organisation. This level of evaluation can go as far as putting monetary estimates on the value of this increased performance. (Cacioppe, 1998)



Picture 1, The Kirkpatrick model

Far too often companies lack evidence that their leadership development investments add the intended value, and when businesses fail to prove changes in leadership

performances over time they instead increase the odds that improvement initiatives will not be taken seriously. Far too often the evaluation begins and ends with participant feedback (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014).

2.3.3.6 Integrate with human resource systems

The next step in this model requires the participants' manager to be aware of the content of the leadership program and push the participants to try out and implement the new learnings. The human resource system, e.g. selection, performance management, rewards etc., in the organisation must also be aligned with the leadership program. For example, taught skills and expected behaviours could be added to performance appraisals and promotion criteria. This encourage the participants to implement the newly learned skills and ideas since the workplace environment support the transfer of the skills and ideas into the daily business. If this step is not taken, then the time, effort and expense taken during the program is lost because it is not actively encouraged and reinforced within the person's actual work environment.

2.3.3.7 Evaluation of strategic imperatives, objectives & HR systems

This final step of the model requires a look at the broader and deeper questions of the leadership development program. It involves looking at the entire process, e.g. if it is delivering the intended value to the business, when and where the program is run.

This requires looking at the program as part of the business and asking where this activity is working well and how it can it be improved. This activity needs to be given proper time and thought by the senior executive team and often needs to be facilitated by an outside consultant in order to ensure objectivity and a reasonable structure to the process. (Cacioppe, 1998)

2.3.4 Summary leadership development

According to Vicere (1997) many leadership development programs spend most of their efforts identifying methods and approaches (referring to step 3 in the model above) and selecting providers and learning methods (referring to step 4). The objectives (referring to step 2) are often set by the HR professionals and then approved by the management instead of having a fruitful discussion, and agreeing, upon what is needed from a leadership perspective. Vicere (1997) is also stating that evaluations and assessments of outcomes, competencies and behavioural changes are very limited.

2.4. Design thinking

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and define what design thinking is. It starts with some short history of the approach and then it describes more in detail what different working steps that are included. It also covers what competencies that are needed to work effectively with design thinking. Close to the end of the chapter there are examples of how design thinking is used within different HR processes today, and finally an important summary of what risks and concerns the approach bring.

2.4.1 Some history

Design thinking is by no means a new term or concept, but it is only recently that the notion of design thinking has found its way into the management literature. In

particular, the popularity of the concept of design thinking aligns with a number of trends in the general management discourse on the (new) conditions for innovation, emphasizing concepts such as *open innovation* (Chesbrough, 2003) and *user-driven innovation* (von Hippel, 1988).

For example, Edison’s approach when inventing the bulb was an early example of what is now called design thinking—a methodology that imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human-centred design in focus (Brown, 2018). Another example is the Wright brothers who built their first successful airplane after spending years prototyping and iterating on their designs. They embraced learning from failure as a route to success. (Butler, 2018)

The term design thinking is composed of two ambiguous words that challenge a straightforward definition. Consequently, design thinking is often left with definitions such as “approaching managerial problems as designers approach design problems” (Dunne & Martin, 2006, p 512).

In the second half of the twentieth century design became a more and more important competitive asset, not least in the consumer electronics and car industry. But in most other industries it remained to be an add-on in the very last stages of the development process. Today designers are asked to create ideas that better meet the consumers’ needs up front instead of asking them to make an already developed idea more attractive. With this change design work has gone from being tactical to being more strategic (Brown, 2008).

2.4.2 So what is design thinking

Design Thinking is the codifying of practises and methods into a series of steps - an articulated design process. It is a recipe to follow that imposes some order onto the messy, often subjective business of designing. In other words, Design Thinking can be thought as thinking and doing like a designer – i.e. designing! And there are today many flavours of Design Thinking. IDEO, IBM, d.School and the British Design Council all have versions of it. (Butler, 2018)

Simply described, design thinking means focusing on the person and the experience, not the process. At its core, working as a designer involves studying people at work, and developing *personas* and *profiles* to understand employee demographics, work environment, and challenges. It relies on generating ideas quickly and testing prototypes that generate further ideas, digital tools, and solutions (Bersin, Solow, Wakefield, 2016)

To be a bit more concrete, design thinking is a creative design model. One of the original approaches was taught by the Stanford d.school. It consists of five phases, or steps, and these are:

- Emphasize
- Define
- Ideate
- Prototype
- Test

In the next sections I will describe these steps in detail according to Malamed (2018):

2.4.2.1 Emphasize

An industrial designer, and design educator, named Paul Backett, claims that great designers are also great empathizers. And this is what separates a design that has soul from one that is simply well-realized. To *emphasize* means for example to research the audience as an ethnographer, to study and record the needs of the target population. But it includes more than just analysing, it is about experiencing the feelings, and trying to understand what it is like to have their challenges. This could be done via, for example:

- Field research: Observe and talk to your selected audience in their real life environment and try to imagine what it would be like to be in their situation (e.g. their job) and try to discover problems that may not be obvious at a first glance.
- Interviews: Interview relevant individuals, for example both managers and employees to clearly understand their issues and the characteristics of the people you are trying to support.
- Focus groups: Conduct research in smaller groups to explore and understand their attitudes. Try to discover their values and beliefs, and what motivates and demotivates them.

In short, to emphasize is all about understanding the problem you are about to solve in detail and doing that by understanding the people who normally are facing the problem.

2.4.2.2 Define

To define in this case means to define the problem, e.g. ineffective trainings are often based on an incorrect understanding of the real problem. In Design thinking it is important to accurately and carefully define the problem. If you spend enough time on this you might discover that, for example, a training is not at all the solution. This is why it is so important to define the problem through research, and to look at it from many angles and perspectives. Without a clearly defined problem it is almost impossible to generate a corresponding solution.

2.4.2.3 Ideate

To Ideate, or ideation, is a critical step of design thinking. This is, ideally, when a cross disciplinary team generate solution ideas to the well-defined problem. This step might involve collaboration and co-designing with the selected audience, and it is beneficial to create as many ideas as possible since that means more potential solutions. All ideas are considered and there are no constraints or restrictions. Different ways of creating ideas could be:

- Brainstorming with sticky notes, all members of the exercise writes ideas on a sticky note and post them on the wall. The exercise continues until all ideas are emptied out, or the agreed time runs out. In the end the sticky notes are organized into logical groups and all ideas are discussed.
- Sketch, for many people sketching ideas is a way to short circuit the judgement side of the brain. Sketching can support you to tap into a flow of new ideas, and it is completely acceptable to use stick figures and geometric shapes.
- Manipulative verbs, you could simply create a long list of action verbs when working through ideas to find solutions. These verbs might spark new ideas and solutions.

- Mind maps, which is a type of drawing that connect different ideas, and it is a good way of exploring many sides to a problem. This could be done both alone and in groups.

2.4.2.4 Prototype

A prototype is a preliminary version of an approach and provides a way to rapidly try out ideas without a large investment of time and money. Think of a prototype as a low-resolution or low-fidelity model of a concept. Prototypes could be created from cardboard, or by using paper and pencils. Below are some examples of different ways to create prototypes:

- Sketches, you could by using paper and pencils, or a digital drawing tool, visualize all possible responses to an interaction.
- Mock-ups, a mock-up is a simulated version of an idea that replicates how it will look and behave. These could range from a Styrofoam model to a working user interface of an online experience.
- Small implementation, if your solution involves something that is not psychical, such as a learning program, then your prototype would be to build a small and rough solution that you could try for a small group of people.

2.4.2.5 Test

Design thinking is an iterative process that involves a lot of testing and improvements along the way. You could say that testing is all about to see what works in the real world, i.e. to get feedback and refine (or ditch) your prototype. It is important that you do your testing with the selected audience in every iteration of your work.

(Malamed, 2018).

2.4.3 Competencies needed to work with Design thinking

Let's look at what competencies that are needed to work with Design thinking, in other words who can use this approach.

Brown (2008) states that

“Contrary to popular opinion, you do not need weird shoes or a black turtleneck to be a design thinker. Nor are design thinkers necessarily created only by design schools, even though most professionals have had some kind of design training. My experience is that many people outside professional design have a natural aptitude for design thinking, which the right development and experiences can unlock.” (Brown, 2008, p 3)

On the other hand, Lawson (2006) states that in difference to knowledge workers, who typically have an engineering or business degree, designers are predominantly educated in art schools, where processes of knowledge creation are marked by interaction with visual and physical elements as well as with words and numbers. Design schools normally use design studios as their central educational device. In a process of learning by doing, students get a number of design problems to solve. They learn how to design largely by *doing* rather than by studying and analysing.

Drawing and sketching constitute an essential part of the knowledge creation process. Designers learn to think with their hands (Collopy, 2004), using sketches, prototypes, and intuition to arrive at their final solutions. Schön (1983) described this process as *having a conversation* with the drawing. Design as problem-solving is thus embodied in

character and requires the ability to embrace many different kinds of thought and knowledge—art, science, and technology. Design solutions therefore tend to be holistic, and designers have been referred to as *knowledge brokers* (Hargadon & Sutton, 2000).

Different authors have obviously different views on what type of background that is needed in order to work successfully with design thinking. And Brown (2008) has the more pragmatic approach that it is rather the characteristics of the person than the formal education that matters. He states that the following characteristics are good to look for in design thinkers:

- Empathy, meaning having the ability to imagine the world from multi perspectives. It is also about having a *people first* approach and the ability to observe the world in detail.
- Integrative thinking, meaning that they do not only rely on analytical processes but also the ability to see what stands out and create solutions that go beyond and dramatically improve an existing alternative.
- Optimism, meaning that no matter how challenging a given problem is, there is always a solution that is better than the existing alternative.
- Experimentalism, meaning the ability to pose questions and explore constraints in creative ways that proceed in completely new directions.
- Collaboration, meaning that the best design thinkers not only collaborate and work alongside other disciplines, many of them have significant experience from more than one.

2.4.4 Design thinking in HR

Design thinking could also be used in the area of HR, and some advocates that it actually is a must to do so.

“To relieve the overwhelmed employee and develop HR applications that can help manage complexity, HR must adopt design thinking, which puts the employee experience at the centre. Design thinking moves HR’s focus beyond building programs and processes to a new goal: designing a productive and meaningful employee experience through solutions that are compelling, enjoyable, and simple” (Bersin, Solow & Wakefield, 2016, p 1).

And to integrate

“design thinking into a company's HR strategy can be fairly simple, and does not need big budgets and reforms. It is more in the nature of questioning and changing mind-sets for a fresh outlook. Begin by asking questions and understanding the employee mind-set and expectations, and thereafter, design innovative solutions, test and implement them” (Das, 2018, p 1).

Das (2018) continues to explain his view of the benefits of for example an immersive, flexi learning programme, where individuals have the choice of what, when, and how much to learn. Design thinking is all about creating compelling, meaningful individual experiences. It is thinking 'different' to make an impact, to empower employees to use their talent and potential to the maximum, and an opportunity for HRMs to make a positive impact and provide the power to drive the organisation to greater success.

Design thinking is important, and it works. In this year’s survey, respondents at companies where HR delivers the highest levels of value are almost five times more likely to be using design thinking in their programs than their peers (Bersin, Solow & Wakefield, 2016, p 1)

Bersin et al. (2016) continues by stating that design thinking casts HR in a new role. It transforms HR from being a process developer to become an experience architect. It empowers HR to reimagine every aspect of work: the physical environment, how people meet and interact, how managers spend their time, and how companies select, train, engage, and evaluate people.

Companies are today also using design thinking to improve learning dramatically. Deckers Brands, Nestlé, and Qualcomm have used design thinking to develop highly intuitive, experiential learning programs. Experiential learning programs begin with the individual and the context of an employee's work rather than a model in which the presenter is the focus. They offer learning programs that are much more stimulating and engaging and lead to higher skills retention. In addition, they do not depend on a learning management system but can leverage new learning technologies to promote continuous learning (Bersin, Solow, Wakefield, 2016).

Bersin et al (2016) finally concludes that to prototype, pilot, test and learn new learning programs with a small group it is possible to identify what this group loves and what they dislike, and by this simple approach HR can improve the end to end employee experience.

2.4.4 Risks and concerns with design thinking

Butler (2018) states that in her opinion...

“both the strength and weakness of Design Thinking is its reliance on multidisciplinary teams. It's great to break down silos and get different areas of the business working together on projects. In workshops, I've regularly witnessed the passion and energy of these multidisciplinary teams – and yes, ideas do emerge that designers alone couldn't have shaped without the wider input. The downside to this method is one of practicality. It is often difficult to find ongoing quality time with the multidisciplinary teams to push the ideas further and continuously evaluate them before testing with the user” (Butler, 2018, p 7).

Butler (2018) continues with another critique to the design thinking approach, and that is the lack of integrating critique into the Design Thinking process. This would help to identify problems with the prototype and get more relevant business input before testing. But just because Design Thinking doesn't have a clear, defined step for critiques doesn't mean you can't do it. Often, the biggest challenge isn't what to do with the critique feedback, but simply to get people to clear their diaries. (Butler, 2018).

Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer (2019) states that one surprising component that makes design thinking challenging for many users of the approach is: discomfort. The reason for discomfort is that staff typically enjoy a high level of competence in their work, and when diving deep into design thinking it is common that they hit a point where they feel lost. The process is meant to move people from their own perspectives and to increase their understanding. The idea is also to make users adopt new viewpoints, and this process can create uneasiness and discomfort.

The design thinking process can also be challenging for leaders since no one knows what the outcome of the process might be. This also means that leaders must embrace the fact that their staff might bring up ideas and insights that are better, and more accepted by the team, than their own ideas. Other challenges for the leaders might be

that the users of the designed solution (e.g. the customer of a product, a service or a training program) might prefer something else than what was expected, and the problem you thought were the problem maybe wasn't the real problem.

Finally, design thinking can be both challenging and take time, for example to research the problem carefully can take time and it can be hard to know when the research is good enough. E.g. having too much research to analyse is not an efficient use of staff and can also make the research difficult for the team to use effectively (Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer, 2019)

2.5 Theory summary

The theory chapter has come to its end and the ambition has been to clarify how the literature have been searched and selected, and some criticism to the chosen sources has been put forward.

The term *leadership* has been defined for this thesis, and competence development in general and the *development of leadership* competences in particular have been clarified. One chosen model for leadership development has been described more in detail and a detailed description of *design thinking*, and its risks, has been presented.

These theories, and clarifications, will be used in chapter 4 where the result from the empirical research and the analysis will be presented.

3. Method

The method chapter explains the chosen method, how the research was performed, how the respondents were selected, how the captured data was analysed and how quality aspects have been regarded. Reflections and criticism to the chosen method is not found in this chapter but placed in the Discussion chapter.

3.1.1. Science theory and chosen methodology

A qualitative research is relevant when you want to differ between the significant and the trivial and identify important patterns. And according to Flick (2014) there could be a number of different reasons to conduct a qualitative analysis:

- Describe a phenomenon more or less detailed, identify commonalities and/or differences.
- Identify conditions/prerequisites for the identified differences
- Develop a theory about the researched phenomenon (Fejes and Thornberg, 2015).

The purpose with this study is, as stated in chapter 1.2, to describe, and analyse whether design thinking, or parts of design thinking, today are used in the creation of formal leadership development. The chosen approach is interpretative, and to be even more precise it is the science theory called hermeneutic that is chosen. The reason for this choice is that this science theory perspective is grounded in interpretations from the respondents. The hermeneutic approach is built upon interpretations and mediation that can be used to mediate experiences of different phenomenon. (Thuren, 2007). This is a relevant approach since this study is interested in the respondent's own experiences. Typical for the hermeneutic approach is preunderstanding. All humans have some kind of preunderstanding and bias, and the hermeneutic approach is built upon recognition and previous experiences. This outlook comprises an interest for the human and to understand other humans and their conditions (Ibid.).

The preunderstanding I bring, as the researcher in this thesis, is my own experience of both attending, designing and conducting formal leadership development programs in a business context during the past 15 years.

3.1.2. Different types of reasoning

People attempt to comprehend the world around them by using three types of reasoning: deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning and the combined inductive-deductive approach called abductive (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007).

Deductive reasoning means that the researcher originates from a general truth (e.g. a theory) and based on this theory the researcher creates a hypothesis that is proven in one or many cases. In this way the researcher is trying to get support for the hypothesis in the empirical research.

Inductive reasoning means that the researcher makes conclusions based on a number of individual cases. Through observations and experiences the researcher will find

conclusions. Inductive conclusions are never binding since future research might bring new insights.

Abductive reasoning means that the researcher constructs a hypothesis that explains an individual empirical case in a more trustworthy way than any other possible hypothesis. Then the researcher uses this *truth* for continued research. These explanations or conclusions are always preliminary and open for new input. In this reasoning the researcher goes back and forth between the theory and the empirical material.

This thesis is built upon a deductive approach where the theory that will be evaluated is design thinking as an approach and if it is used when designing formal leadership development programs and if it could add value to formal leadership development. No hypothesis has been generated since this is not regarded as a must for a deductive approach. The empirical research has evaluated the above-mentioned theory, which is also the purpose of this thesis.

3.2. The empirical research

In the coming sub chapters the empirical research will be described in detail.

3.2.1. Semi structured interviews

In order to evaluate and analyse the purpose of this thesis it was decided that interviews with relevant respondents would be the best method to capture the needed data.

Interviews gives you a good view of other humans' experiences, opinions, attitudes and feelings (May, 1997). Kvale (1997) states that a qualitative researcher is trying to understand and describe the meaning in the central themes in the respondent's world.

Initially in this thesis there was an idea to also use document analysis as another method to capture the relevant data needed, but after some discussions (with the supervisor of this thesis, among others) based on preunderstanding and experiences it was decided that this approach will not give additional value since it was deemed very unlikely that the researched companies would have a document describing their approach to leadership development in general and specifically connected to design thinking.

Before conducting a series of interviews, it is important to design an interview that fulfil your purposes. The initial idea in this thesis was to conduct structured interviews, but after the initial design of the interview guide (more information about this in the next chapter) a pilot interview was conducted. The selected respondent for the pilot interview was a known employee from a relevant company. It became obvious in this pilot interview that a lot of input would be missed with a too structured interview guide. During the end of the pilot interview the guide was not fully followed and this conscious test to try a more semi structured approach paid off well, not least since it gave the respondent more freedom to both answer with own examples as well as steering the interview a bit more.

3.2.2. The creation of the interview guide

As mentioned in the previous sub chapter, the original interview guide was created in order to perform structured interviews but since the pilot interview showed that this was

not the best approach, the guide was restructured to allow for a more semi structured interview approach. This approach gave the respondent more possibility to highlight her own perception of the questions.

Another learning from the pilot interview was that the respondent referred too much to informal learnings which was not the intention since that is one of the limitations of this thesis. This was however a very useful insight that fairly easy could be corrected before the first interview was conducted.

The questions were structured in categories that gave the respondent the possibility to also further develop her answer based on possible follow up questions (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne, 2015).

The categories in the final version of the interview guide are:

- Introduction
- Context
- Identifying the need
- Design
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Miscellaneous

The reason for this structure was that it felt logical to structure the interviews in a chronological order for how many companies (at least to my preunderstanding) are working with this matter. The categories secured also that the questions could be connected to the purpose and research questions, and they also created a structure which is beneficial according to Eriksson-Zetterquist and Ahrne (2015).

All in all the interview guide contained 26 questions divided between the seven categories, but it is important to mention that all questions were not put to all respondents if their previous answers led in a different direction.

3.2.3. The sample of respondents

When creating a sample, it is important that the chosen arena and target group is aligned with the overall ambition for the research and that the sample will be able to answer the purpose and the questions related to the relevant research (Svensson & Ahrne, 2015).

In this thesis the main conditions for the respondent were the following:

- Employed in a company of relevant size, i.e. a company that conduct formal leadership development
- Experience from managing formal leadership development
- Responsible for formal leadership development in their business context

Eight possible respondents were identified based upon above criteria, and it was not deemed so important if their companies where acting in different industries since the focus is on leadership which exists in all industries. It was regarded more important that the company was of decent size so that formal leadership development was addressed in the company. The size of the companies, in terms of number of employees spans between a few hundred to many thousands.

To simplify the process of getting hold of strong respondents within the given time frame for this thesis the respondents were identified via known networks. The identified respondents were contacted via email and asked if they were willing to attend.

The initial ambition was to conduct four to five interviews, but out of the eight identified respondents six accepted. Out of these six respondents three are in a position as head of HR (for either the whole company or for the region/country), and three of them are in the position as head of talent management (also here for either the whole company or for the region/country), which include the discipline of leadership development in these companies. All six companies conduct business in Sweden but they also act on an international market. Three interviews were conducted in Stockholm and three in Skåne. Three interviews were conducted in the respondents' workplace and three in public places (restaurants and coffee shops).

3.2.5. Conducting interviews

Since interviews are built upon questions that we as researchers would like to have answers to, the researcher is fully dependent upon the respondents' willingness to answer these questions. It is therefore important to try to motivate the respondents, so they see a reason to answer the interview questions. This could be done by explaining the purpose of the interview with support from information about different aspects. (Patel & Tebelius, 1987).

Kvale (1997) on the other hand states that it is a delicate balance to express the purpose of the research or not. To give away too much information can impact the respondents to not give a fully unaffected answer, but to give too little information can withhold important aspects from the respondents.

In this empirical research the purpose was not expressed up front, and the reason for this was to not impact the respondents. It was not expected that the companies were using design thinking, not to its full extent at least, in their formal leadership development. Based on this it was deemed that the respondents would adjust their answers if the full purpose would have been shared. It was clearly stated in all interviews that their contribution was confidential, and this is important to clarify according to Patel & Tebelius (1987). I believe that the confidentiality was very beneficial from an outspokenness perspective, even though I can understand the criticism connected to it (more information about this in chapter 5.2 Discussion of the chosen method).

The interviews lasted between 45 to 80 minutes. The difference between them from a length perspective was primarily the interest, energy and outspokenness from the respondents.

The ambition and plan were to record all interviews but it turned out that it was too noisy in the public area where the first interview was conducted to use the recording in a qualitative manner, luckily detailed notes were also taken so the quality of the input is not deemed to be impacted. The respondent in the second interview preferred to not be recorded so also this interview was performed without recording but with very detailed notes. After these two initial interviews there was a need to decide if recording should be proposed in the following interviews, with the effect that some interviews were recorded, and some were not. Support for the decision was searched for in previous

research and finally the decision to not propose recording in the remaining interviews were taken.

Hayes and Mattimoe (2004) states that

this confirms that, in practise, both the route of taping interviews and that of manual recording of data can be effective in the craft of qualitative research, suggesting that there is no 'one-best-way' to tackle the task of data collection. The decision to tape or not to tape is influenced by a number of key determinants. These include (a) the nature of the research topic; (b) the willingness of the interviewee to be taped; (c) the interviewer's preference and competence with either technique, as well as (d) the benefits and drawbacks of the techniques themselves.

The two determinants (according to above) that influenced the decision was the extensive experience of performing interviews without recording, referring to determinant (c) above and the deemed willingness of the interviewee's to be recorded, referring to determinant (b) above. Since the willingness to be recorded was deemed as quite low, not least based on one of the initial two interviews as mentioned above, there was a risk that the recording should cause an unease for the respondents which could have a negative impact on the quality of the data gathered (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 1997).

All interview notes were managed immediately after the interview to make sure that the input was remembered correctly. In those cases where there was a risk for misunderstandings in the notes the respondents have been contacted again (in written) to confirm the interpretation.

3.2.6. Data processing and data analysis

The data processing and data analysis usually starts with several readings of the printed scripts from the interviews that will be used to answer the purpose and research questions. The reason for the first reading is to get a preliminary understanding of the totality before the interpretation of the different parts starts. It is important that the researcher consciously considers if his/her pre-understanding in any way steer or impact the understanding of the reading (Gademers, 1997).

Lundman and Hällgren Graneheim (2017) describe that a data analysis process can differ and be shaped in different ways. Below is a description of the used steps in the analysis process in this thesis, after the initial reading mentioned above.

The next step in the data analysis was to identify sense units in the written scripts from the interviews. Sense units means sentences or phrases that seems important for the purpose of the research. Lundman and Hällgren Graneheim (2017) states that surrounding text should also be included in order to keep the context, otherwise there a risk that parts of the cohesion will be lost or that the result will be fragmented. This is considered in the data analysis performed in this thesis.

The sense units have been condensed in order to shorten the text but to still keep the content, and the condensed sense units has been coded and grouped into categories that represents the core of the interview input. To code a sense unit means that it gets a short description of its content and then it is abstracted with other similar sense units. The work to code and categorize the sense units was initially performed via colour coding and then via a cut and paste exercise. When doing coding of sense units, it is important to not analyse the input too much (Lundman and Hällgren Graneheim, 2017).

The initial categories were the same as the categories in the interview guide, but after some analysis some of the categories were removed and some others were merged or added. This was done via identifying similarities and differences in the given answers from the respondents and put in relation to the purpose of the research. Lundman and Hällgren Graneheim (2017) states that through coding it is possible for the researcher to mirror the core message and the context of the sense units that corresponds to the purpose and the research questions. Through this analysis the following final categories were identified, and these categories are the base for the following analysis and discussion:

- Leadership development in general
- Identifying the need for leadership development
- Designing and conducting the formal learning solution
- Evaluation of the formal learning solution

See an extract from the full qualitative analysis in the table below:

Input from the interviews (in Swedish)	Further/Condensed description	Code	Category
Det finns ingen direction för tillfället	Lack of direction	General leadership development approach	Leadership development in general
Nej, vi erbjuder inte några ledarskapsträningar för non-managers	Approach for conducting leadership sessions	General leadership development approach	Leadership development in general
Tränaren från stepstone var på plats och intervjuade en massa chefer från våra två chefsled,	Example of they identify need	Identify the need	Identifying the need for leadership development
Vi har väldigt starka värderingar och det är dessa värderingar som ligger till grund för den ledarskapsutveckling som vi har tagit fram.	Example of basis for design	Design of training	Designing and conducting the formal learning solution
Finns ganska stora friheter att utveckla lokala möjligheter	Example of basis for design	Design of training	Evaluation of the formal learning solution
HRBPs erfarenhet stor betydelse eftersom de ger också input till vad som bör fokuseras på.	Example of they identify need	Identify the need	Identifying the need for leadership development
Vi måste få det tillräckligt konkret, vi kan inte jobba med att bli bättre på ledarskap, det är för brett, vi måste bli bättre på att konkretisera.	The importance of being precise when describing the need	Identify the need	Identifying the need for leadership development
Vi har inte riktigt tiden och kraften att iterera lösningarna.	They dont have the time and energi to iterate	Design of training	Designing and conducting the formal learning solution
Vi sätter mål utifrån de svar vi får via medarbetarenkäten	The goal is set based on co-sorlet survey	Goal setting for the training	Designing and conducting the formal learning solution

Table 1, Extract from the qualitative analysis

3.3. Quality aspects

Fejes and Thornberg (2015) states that we use the term quality as an overriding term to describe a qualitative study that is carefully and systematically conducted and where elegance and an innovative mind-set is well balanced with a critical analysis. This includes both sensitive and emphatic closeness as well as analytical distance. The result of the research, and its conclusions, should also be formulated in a clear and well written manner and well anchored in the empirical work.

The ambition of this thesis is clearly to meet all above perspectives of quality. The different steps in the research work has been carefully and systematically both planned and executed, and they have also been carefully described in this thesis.

The purpose to evaluate if design thinking could add value in formal leadership development could absolutely be regarded as an innovative approach, and the critical

analyses is well mentioned in the chapter covering analysis and result. A clear connection between the theory and the empirical result is also shown in these chapters.

The ambition has been to be clear in the formulations and to write the text in a good manner, but that is up to the reader to evaluate.

Kjaer and Jensen (1995) states that two other terms that should be take into consideration are reliability and validity. Reliability refers to if the result from the data gathering is independent from temporary, and from a research perspective uninteresting, circumstances. The validity is connected to if the result from the empirical research is interpreted in a correct way. Both these dimensions are considered even though it is always hard to evaluate the validity aspect in a qualitative study, but there is high confidence in the conclusions made. The reliability aspect is in a way possible to evaluate as a reader of this thesis since the process from setting the purpose to the interviews to the conclusions are described.

It is of course important to confirm that I, as the researcher, have not consciously impacted the result, e.g. the interviews have been conducted with strong consideration to not impact the respondent, which can also be observed in the interview guide (see appendix 1). It has not been regarded as difficult to not impact the respondents in this work since no clear view on the researched area exists.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were not recorded and this might have both a positive and negative impact on the result. The recording can impact the respondents negatively when it comes to their answers on the other hand it can be very supportive when interpreting the result (May, 1997). For this research it feels like a correct decision since it is expected that the recording would have clearly impacted the outspokenness of the respondents, not least since, as previously mentioned, the were not expected to use design thinking to its full extent. The risk that mistakes have been made in the interpretations and analysis of the respondents answers cannot be fully eliminated but it is deemed unlikely.

One final aspect of quality that should be mentioned are transferability. This aspect focuses on how transferable the results are to a different environment. This is hard to achieve in a qualitative study like this one, and therefore is the focus primarily to describe carefully both the process and the identified details in the selected sample. This thesis is not trying to accomplish a transferable result but instead focus on the experiences from the interviewed respondents.

Finally, this thesis is written with the guiding star that a continuous explanation, reasoning and arguing of the different decisions made by the researcher characterizes a well performed qualitative study.

3.3.1. Ethical aspects

Ethical aspects should be regarded by the researcher through all steps in research. This thesis is written in line with the *Research ethical principles in humanistic and social scientific research* written by *Vetenskapsrådet* in Sweden. These ethical principles consist of four main principles/requirements.

The requirement connected to:

- *Information* is about that all respondents should be informed that their participation is voluntarily and that they can choose to terminate their participation at all times.
- *Consent* is about that the respondents should give their consent to participate in the research.
- *Confidentiality* is about that the respondents' name, and other personal data, should not be written in a way that it is possible to identify the respondents.
- *Usage* is about that the captured data can only be used for the purpose of research.

All four principles/requirements are fulfilled in this thesis. The requirements connected to information and consent was covered already in the invitation to the respondents. Since the respondents accepted to attend the interviews they agreed to participate in this research.

In the beginning of each interview the confidentiality and usage principles were agreed with the respondents. It was important for some of the respondents that their data were treated completely confidential while it was of less importance for some of the respondents. It was still agreed with all of them that their names and their companies would not be shared.

It is also important that the research work follows *rules for scientific work*. It is important to clearly show what is the views, and opinions, from the researcher versus others (Wallén, 1996). This is clearly shown in this thesis by the use of references when others' theories, opinions and thoughts are shared. The thesis is also structured in different chapters, e.g. a theory chapter where only scientifically approved sources are used, an empirical chapter where only the respondents' views are shared and a chapter where the result is shared via a connection between the theories and the empirical result.

4. Result and analysis

In this chapter the result and analysis from the empirical studies are presented, i.e. from the interviews that earlier has been described. The result and the analysis are woven together in four chapters. These chapters are the final categories based on the data analysis described in chapter 3.2.6, and these chapters are: General leadership development approach, Identifying the need for leadership development, Designing and conducting the formal learning solution and Evaluation of the formal learning solution.

In order to connect this chapter as close as possible to the purpose of this thesis, only the relevant empirical data, and needed background information, will be presented as part of the result and the analysis. This means that the total amount of data captured in the interviews is much bigger than what is presented here.

It is also important to remember that all input in this thesis is confidential. This means that the answers will not be presented in a way that makes it possible to connect them to a specific person or company. In order to simplify the text, I have chosen to refer to all respondents as female, i.e. by using ‘*she*’ or ‘*her*’.

Before the result and analysis starts there is a need to give some additional information, and remind about the context for these interviews.

- Six respondents were interviewed. Three of them are in the position as Head of HR (for the whole company, or for the country), and three of them are in the position as Head of Talent management (again for the whole company or for the country).
- All companies do business in both Sweden and on the international market.
- The number of employees in the companies spans between a few hundred to many thousands.
- The number of managers in the responsibility of the respondents spans between approx. 10 managers to approx. 400 managers. The majority of the respondents have the responsibility for between 50 to 150 managers.
- All respondents, except one, are responsible for managers also placed outside of Sweden, but in Europe.
- The managers in all involved companies are responsible for both business and people related matters, i.e. they are not to be regarded as either or (e.g. project managers without staff responsibility or resource managers without business responsibility).

The result and analysis will, as mentioned, be presented in the following sub chapters where every chapter starts with a short introduction to simplify for the reader. Quotation marks are consistently used when the respondents are exactly quoted in the text.

4.1 Leadership development in general

This sub chapter presents the respondents’ and their companies’ view on the importance of leadership development, and also how they are working with formal leadership development in general. It also covers if the company are building leadership skills in employees that currently are not in a management position but might have the aspiration to be so, or not.

4.1.1 Result

After the introduction in the interviews (which covered more background information about the respondents and their positions) the respondents were asked to share their view on the importance of leadership in their organisation. All respondents agreed that a successful leadership is very important for their company. It was clear that the different respondents included different perspectives in the term *leadership*. One respondent answered: “When I talk about leadership I include everyone, since everyone leads at least oneself”. Another respondent was clear that she was only referring to their managers when talking about leadership.

On the theme of how important the leadership was regarded, a respondent expressed that the leadership of their managers made an immense difference in how the employees interpreted their tasks, their motivation, their sick leave rate and their success and that this was clearly shown in the annual employee survey that the company conducted. More than one of the respondents also expressed that they saw a need to invest more in the development of their leadership given that it is shown as so important for the success of the company, but that it was hard to convince the management about this investment. One respondent expressed: “I would love to invest more in our managers, and it would also be much needed, but it is hard to find the time and money”.

The respondents were also asked about how they today work with formal development of their leaders and managers. This question showed that the companies were working, and investing, very differently in leadership development. It is not possible, based on this research, to find an easy explanation, such as size or geographical spread, to why some companies invest much more in this area since all of them were in agreement about its importance. Two companies represented by the interviewees expressed that they, at least at the moment, lack a direction or definition about what leadership they would like to see and develop within their company. And they further expressed that it is very hard to focus on formal leadership development without this foundation in place. “Without a clear direction I’m actually not sure what type of leadership development I should develop” as one respondent expressed it.

Two interviewees described that they had developed a very clear definition and description of the leadership behaviours that they would like to see within their companies. These two companies were also investing much more in developing these behaviours compared with the other companies in this research.

Another difference between the different companies’ approaches to formal leadership development that became obvious during the interviews were connected to whom they were offering these trainings. Two companies were clearly targeting managers in more senior positions with different development solutions, such as trainings, mentors etc., while three companies clearly targeted all leaders and managers in their organizations. One company expressed:

“We have earlier focused primarily on managers in more senior positions but we didn’t really see the movement we wanted in the leadership so now the last years we have focused on all managers and we see a much better result.”

Only one of the companies were offering formal leadership development to future potential managers, i.e. to employees with the capacity and motivation to become

managers. Two companies had assessment sessions for potential future managers which in itself offers a possibility to growth via the feedback received in the assessment. The other companies were in different ways expressing that they would benefit from having something to offer future leaders or managers but that it was not in their learning portfolio right now.

4.1.2 Analysis

In the result presented above it is possible to see that the term *leadership* can be interpreted in different ways. One respondent immediately interpreted one question (where leadership was mentioned) to be valid for every employee in their organisation since she meant that everyone exercise leadership, not least to lead oneself, while another respondent was only referring to the managers of the organisation when questions about leadership was raised. A third respondent referred to both managers and project leaders who manage projects but do not have the responsibility for staff. This is interesting in relation to the view of Yukl (2001) who expresses that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons that have tried to define it.

It is also interesting to compare the respondents' very clear view on how important successful leadership is for their companies with the statements from Johansson (2013) who states that a communicative and involving leadership has positive impact on e.g. motivation, attrition rate, sick leave etc.

As mentioned above, two companies expressed that they, at least at the moment, lack a direction or definition about what leadership they would like to see and develop within their company. And they further expressed that it is very hard to focus on formal leadership development without this foundation in place. These statements goes well in line with the criticism towards leadership development programs from Gurdjian, Halbeisen & Lane (2014) who means that far too many training initiatives rest on the assumption that one size fits all and that the same skills or style of leadership is appropriate regardless of strategy or organizational culture. You could appreciate that these companies are not conducting these types of one size fits all leadership programs without having a foundation in place, on the other hand it is interesting that all companies recognizing the importance of successful leadership and still some of the companies are lacking both a proper foundation as well as supporting development material.

Two of the companies were expressing that they had different *development activities* related to possible future leaders, and the other four were expressing that they would benefit from having the same. This is very well in line with the arguments from Conger & Fulmer (2003) who argues that it is very important for an organisation to identify and develop also the leaders and managers for the future.

4.2 Identifying the need for leadership development

This sub chapter describes how the respondents, and their companies, are identifying the actual need and consequently what they should focus on in their formal leadership development.

4.2.1 Result

The companies expressed four different ways of capturing the actual need for their formal leadership development.

- *Through their values.* One of the interviewees expressed that all their leadership development is very tightly connected to the values of the company. They had, based on their values, described which behaviours that were wanted and which behaviours that rather were seen as *derailers*. This was so obvious for this respondent that she even expressed: “Isn’t that how all company must do it?”
- *Through the existing perception within HR and management.* Two of the companies expressed that they base their needs upon the perception of what is needed from the management team, and the HR team. As base for this perception was different interactions with their organization, including for example the employee survey that is mentioned below.
- *Via interviews with relevant stakeholders.* Two companies described that they were doing thorough interviews with relevant stakeholders, such as managers in the organisation, the management team, the HR team etc. to capture what areas that need specific focus in their leadership. They expressed that they were looking for areas that their managers perceived as challenging but also areas that the management team thought were important from a more strategic perspective.
- *Via employee surveys.* All interviewed respondents, except one, mentioned that their employee survey was a very good source for information. In these surveys they were capturing data about e.g. engagement, leadership, and stress levels etc. Three of the respondents mentioned that they performed this survey on annual basis and that it felt to seldom nowadays.

One respondent expressed that they: “...have a clear need to improve when it comes to be more specific, it is not good enough to conclude that we need to improve our leadership. That is far too wide”.

The interviews also clarified which decision body that actually takes decisions about what areas to focus on when it comes to the formal leadership development. And the outcome was that in all companies except one the decisions were taken either by the managing director alone, or by the management team. In one company the decisions were taken by the HR team. “The management team trust as fully in these questions so we take these decisions ourselves within HR” as this respondent expressed it. In all cases were the HR team heavily involved in both identifying the need and summarizing it.

4.2.2 Analysis

It is interesting that only one of the respondents clearly pointed out the importance of aligning the need of their leadership programs with the culture within their organisation. This is well in line with the opinions from Gurdjian, Halbeisen, and Lane (2014) who are critical to many of the training initiatives that they have come across due to, among other things, that they are not aligned with the organisational culture. They mean that too many trainings program have taken the assumption that one size fits all and by that miss out on important parameters.

Another interesting criticism of leadership development programs comes from Cacioppe (1998) who claims that many training programs are not contributing to the business objectives of the organisation. His view is that they may develop managerial skills but they do not substantially contribute to business success. These statements were not supported by the respondents involved in this research since the respondents clarified that they captured the objectives of the organisation in three of the four ways they were using to capture the need, i.e. via the perception of HR and the management team, via the interviews with relevant stakeholders and also via the employee surveys.

There was a big discrepancy between the respondents when it comes to how well they describe what they would like to accomplish with the training programs up front. As mentioned above in chapter 4.2.1 one respondent expressed a clear need to become more specific and precise in describing what leadership skills that actually needs to be further developed. While another respondent expressed that this was very clearly described, and aligned, with the values in the organisation. The spread of these answers are both confirming and rejecting the view of Cacioppe (1998) who states that it is important to define what specific knowledge and skills that should be fulfilled by the completion of the program.

Malamed (2018) means that ineffective trainings often are based on an incorrect understanding of the real problem. She also states that in Design thinking it is important to accurately and carefully define the problem through research and to look at it from many angles and perspectives. This is also where the term *emphatize* is used. To *emphatize* means to research the audience as an ethnographer, i.e. it is about experiencing the feelings and trying to understand what it is like to have their challenges. This could be done via for example field research, interviews or focus groups (Malamed, 2018). This approach is very similar to what the respondents expressed that they did via their interviews, discussions with HR and management and finally via analysis of the employee surveys, even though they did not refer to terms like *emphatize* and Design thinking.

4.3 Designing and conducting the formal learning solution

This sub chapter manage how the respondents, and their companies, are designing and conducting different formal solutions that should fulfil their identified needs.

4.3.1 Result

None of the respondents said that they have a clear process for how to design the learning solution based on the needs that they have identified. One respondent expressed: “I have never thought about how we do the design actually. I assume we just do what feels right”. And another respondent answered that they designed their solutions as they always have designed them, which she unfortunately felt was very old-fashioned classical classroom trainings.

Four of the respondents expressed that they normally describe what they would like to accomplish with their investments connected to formal leadership development, while the other two expressed that they normally are weak in describing the wanted position in a good way. One company expressed that they put targets for what they would like to

accomplish connected to their employee survey, I.e. that they follow up how the employees perceives the leadership before and after a specific investment has taken place.

Two of the companies expressed that they have had an iterative approach to the design and development of their formal trainings. One of these two companies explained that they at least did a pilot (*test*) before they conducted the trainings to the whole organisation, which is one kind of iteration. The other company explained that they did the whole design and development as an iterative process. They designed their solution step by step, and they conducted training sessions without having a clear view on what next step in their training should include. Based on this they expressed: “We see that as a clear benefit. We could follow the discussions and development of the participants and adapt the next step to how they developed”. This respondent was the only respondent familiar with the term Design thinking, and she expressed:

“We used parts of the Design thinking process even if we were not following every step, and I can clearly see how it added value for us. We for example created a prototype of the training that we tried out before we continued the development”.

Five respondents stated that they were not familiar with Design thinking, and four of them stated in different ways that they do not have time nor energy to take an iterative approach to the design of their trainings. The fifth respondent asked for more information about design thinking, and after a short description of the core parts of design thinking she stated that they do use parts, such as prototyping, but without knowing the connection to design thinking.

Through the interviews it became clear that in all companies the HR team were heavily involved in conducting the leadership trainings. One thing that differed across the respondents was who should accompany HR in this work. One company expressed that they normally bring in external consultants for this work to secure a high quality and a broader perspective. Two companies expressed very firmly an opposite view, and one of them said:

“For us it is very important that we conduct all leadership trainings ourselves. What type of signal do we send to the organisation if we need to bring in external consultants to tell us how we should be good leaders in our company?”

The other of these two companies expressed that they are never conducting leadership trainings without having representatives from the management team involved in the full training. “If we do not show how important this is for us, and if we are not involving our senior managers in the trainings then there is no use of doing it at all”.

The respondents were also reasoning around the actual format for their formal leadership development, i.e. if it should be physical meetings where everyone is in the same room, or if digital meeting would fulfil the purpose. Also, on this topic were the opinions slightly diversified, all companies expressed that physical meetings were preferred for formal leadership development. Three companies expressed that it is not possible to deliver this type of trainings digitally while the other companies expressed that a mix of physical meetings and digital meetings is favourable due to time limitations and travel costs. This is of course given that the participants are spread across different offices, or even countries.

4.3.2 Analysis

As mentioned in the chapter above four of the respondents answered that they normally describe in a good way what they would like to accomplish with their leadership development programs, i.e. putting up goals for the program. Geerts (2018) points out that it is important to have the participants managers involved in the process of designing the program, i.e. they should agree to reasonable goals for the program which makes it more likely that they will provide needed support. The same meaning is stated by Nabi et al. (2017) who says that the first step in designing an efficient leadership program is to determine the desired outcomes post the program on both individual, team and organisational level.

One respondent answered that they unfortunately had a very traditional approach to the design of their trainings, i.e. that they were mainly conducting traditional class room trainings. The unfortunate part of that sentence is strongly underlined by Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane (2014), who states that adults, even after very basic training sessions, typically retain just 10% of what they hear in class room lectures. This should be compared with the two thirds that retains when they learn by doing.

Even though the design of the formal leadership development solution could be regarded as important none of the respondents expressed that they have a clear process for doing this. Still it could be regarded that many of the respondents, unconsciously, used parts of the initial phases that Malamed (2018) means constitute Design thinking. She states that design thinking consists of five different phases *Emphasize, Define, Ideate, Prototype* and *Test*. Many of the respondents expressed in different ways that they *emphasize* and *define* when preparing their formal leadership development programs even though they used different words.

The later phases in Design thinking, i.e. *ideate, prototype* and *test* were used to a much smaller extent by the respondents. Malamed (2018) states that *ideate* is a critical phase of design thinking. And she explains that this phase might involve collaboration and codesigning with the selected audience. This way of working was not at all mentioned by five of the respondents while one respondent explained an approach not far from Malameds description. This respondent also expressed that they saw positive effects of the approach. The creation of a prototype was also mentioned only by the same respondent. A prototype is, according to Malamed (2018), a preliminary version of an approach and provides a way to rapidly try out ideas without a large investment of time and money. If your solution is a learning program then your prototype would be to build a small and rough solution that you could try for a small group of people.

The final phase in Design thinking, *test* was indirectly mentioned by two of the respondents.

Design thinking is clearly an interactive process that involves a lot of testing and improvements along the way (Malamed, 2018). Four of the respondents in this research stated in different ways that they do not have time nor energy to take an iterative approach to the design of their trainings.

When it comes to the practicalities in conducting the training programs Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane (2014) states that there is clearly a value in offsite programs that offer participants time to step back and escape the daily business. The respondents were

all aligned that physical meetings are favourable when conducting formal leadership development.

4.4 Evaluation of the formal learning solution

This final chapter covers how the respondents and their companies, are evaluating their formal learning solutions. It looks at both the evaluation of the solutions as such, but also on the effect they bring to their respective company.

4.4.1 Result

The respondents were asked if and how they measure and follow up the effect of their formal leadership development. All respondents had a clear opinion about this topic. One respondent was very hesitant to do evaluations of their leadership trainings, she expressed:

“My view on this is that we support our managers development in order to get better managers that can deliver a better business for us, so I prefer to measure if we get better business or not. There is no value in spending time on following up if the training were appreciated or not, what counts is if it fulfilled its purpose i.e. to deliver better results”.

Five of the respondents explained that they follow up different leadership trainings in their employee survey, i.e. if they can see a development of the leadership in their company in the perception of the employees. One respondent explained: “We have a leadership index for the whole company in our employee survey so it is obvious that we use this measurement to see if we make progress when we conduct leadership trainings”.

One respondent clarified that their primary evaluation of different formal leadership development initiatives are done in the dialogue between the manager and his/her manager. “We have seen that the outcome gets stronger if the manager of the participant is interested and engaged in the trainings, and actually both before and after the training takes place”.

All companies did also some kind of evaluation in relation to the trainings as such, but these evaluations were more focused on practicalities such as the premises, the quality of the facilitators etc. None of the respondents thought these evaluations actually gave insights whether the training would fulfil its purpose or not, but they were seen as a “good first indication if it works out as we have planned or not”, as one respondent phrased it.

4.4.2 Analysis

The respondent expressed different ways of how they follow up and evaluate their formal leadership development initiatives. The different ways that were described were matching very well with the Kirkpatrick model which is probably the best-known model for analysing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs (Kurt, 2016). The model contains four levels of evaluations:

- Reaction/satisfaction
- Learning/Knowledge

- Behaviour
- Results

The following two examples, one in each end of the Kirkpatrick scale, visualize their connection to the mentioned evaluation model.

A) All respondents expressed that they did different kind of evaluations in relation to the trainings, focusing primarily on practicalities, quality of trainers etc. and this type of evaluation is clearly connected to level 1 of the Kirkpatrick model (see *picture 1* in chapter 2.3.3.5).

B) One respondent expressed that her interest was not in measuring the outcome of the training, but rather how the result that the training was intended to impact was developing. This strong, and only, focus on the actual business result is an example of level 4 of the Kirkpatrick model.

Far too often companies lack evidence that their formal leadership development investments add the intended value. When businesses fail to prove changes in leadership performances over time they instead increase the odds that improvement initiatives will not be taken seriously. Far too often the evaluation begins and ends with participant feedback (Gurdjian, Halbeisen & Lane, 2014). Which also in this research was the only evaluation level, according to the Kirkpatrick model, that all respondents conducted.

As mentioned briefly in chapter 4.3.2 two of the respondents did test their formal leadership development trainings in line with the described phases in Design thinking, before implementing them on a broader scale. This is also an important type of early evaluation. You could say that testing is all about to see what works in the real world, i.e. to get feedback and refine (or ditch) your prototype. It is important that you do your testing with the selected audience in every iteration of your work (Malamed, 2018).

5. Discussion

This final chapter contains my own discussions and reflections connected to the presented result and analysis, and this includes a discussion whether the purpose has been fulfilled or not. The chosen method is also discussed and some proposals for future research is shared. The chapter and the whole thesis, is concluded with some final remarks.

5.1 Result discussion

In this chapter I will discuss and reflect upon the result and analysis presented in chapter 4. I have chosen to present the discussion in the same structure that was used for the result and analysis, i.e. in the categories identified in the qualitative analysis of the data. The reflections in this chapter are primarily my own reflections based on my pre-understanding of the topic and of course on the theories and empirical data learned and presented in this thesis

5.1.1 Leadership development in general

In the result and analysis of the category *Leadership development in general* it was presented that leadership is still an unclear term with many different interpretations. I think this is interesting since it is also obvious in both the result and the analysis how important leadership is for the success of any organisation. Even though all respondents agreed to the importance of successful leadership, two of the respondents expressed that they lack a direction or definition of what leadership they would like to see within their company. The result also showed the spread of how much the different companies involved in this research invest in formal leadership development. It would be interesting to better understand why a topic that everyone agrees is important for the success is not more in focus, both when it comes to clear directions and investments in further development.

One area that caught my attention was that only two of the companies was investing in the development of future managers/leaders, i.e. in employees that were not already in a formal leadership position. One could argue that the focus is too short term when companies are not building a pipeline of talented leaders within their own organisation. Such an investment would most likely both stimulate, motivate and retain talented employees with leadership ambitions and at the same time prepare the company for future leadership vacancies. This way of reasoning is also well supported by Conger & Fulmer (2003). One could wonder if the challenge with leadership is not always properly defined and if a design thinking process, not least the phases *empathize* and *define*, would change the perspectives in the companies? Or would such a process be too challenging and take too much time in line with the concerns expressed by Boisvenue-Fox & Meyer (2019)?

It is also interesting to reflect upon what added value the phases of *empathize* and *define* could bring to an organisation. Most likely other challenges, and positive matters, in the organisation would also be captured in this work, i.e. these phases could also add value as a more generic temperature check in the organisation. And would it in such case be worth the extra time investment?

5.1.2 Identifying the need for leadership development

All respondents explained how they identify and capture the need for what to focus on in their formal leadership development. And as expressed as part of the result, they identify this need via the *values of the company*, via an *existing perception* within management and HR, via *interviews* with relevant stakeholders or via their *employee surveys*. At the same time one respondent expressed that they had a clear need to be more specific when it comes to describing what needs they should focus on.

One could argue that capturing the need from interviews and the employee surveys is to work, more or less, according to the design thinking approach. The phase *emphasize* is about understanding the challenge of the target population, and interviews are one way of getting this understanding. I question however if the understanding is deep enough to really be compliant with the thoughts of design thinking since they emphasize the importance of really understanding the researched population on a deeper level.

Design thinking as an approach underlines the importance of accurately and carefully define the problem. Malamed (2018) states that if you spend enough time on this you might discover that, for example, a training is not at all the solution. Therefore it is so important to define the problem through research, and to look at it from many angles and perspectives. Without a clearly defined problem it is almost impossible to generate a corresponding solution.

In design thinking it is a very non-hierarchical decision process where multidisciplinary teams are working together to find the best solutions and decisions, while the result from my research showed that it is the management of the organisation who takes the decision of what to focus on when it comes to formal leadership development. This is in other words quite far from the co-creation with the involved population that is a corner stone in design thinking. On the other hand, it might be a too big effort to get these multidisciplinary teams together to form decisions (Butler, 2018). So maybe it after all is better, or at least faster, to take more hierarchical decisions related to the leadership development needs.

The hierarchical culture in the company will most likely also impact how successful an approach like design thinking would be in general. The design thinking approach fits probably best to a company culture where the employees and managers are encouraged to openly share their challenges and concerns.

5.1.3 Designing and conducting the formal learning solution

None of the respondents in this research had a clear process for how to go from identified needs to a solution. It is interesting to reflect upon the lack of such a process, not least bearing in mind the importance of leadership that was unitedly expressed. Even though the process as such was missing many of the respondents shared that they did describe what they wanted to accomplish with their formal leadership development programs in a good way. One could claim that this means that they have passed the

design thinking phases of *define* and *ideate* to come up with these descriptions, even though they have not followed the design thinking phases literally.

Design thinking is an iterative process where you improve your solution in every iteration. This approach was used to a very limited extent by the respondents, and I believe that this is an area for improvement. I believe that an iterative process (compared with the phases of *prototype* and *test* in Design thinking) would add value and secure quality in the development of leadership trainings. It is a pity that four of the respondents expressed, in different ways, that they were lacking energy and time for iterations in the design of their trainings. I question if they have balanced the value it will bring with the cost connected to it. One of the respondents also expressed that she had used design thinking as a process and that she experienced it positively. The other respondents expressed that they were not familiar with design thinking as a process. This is something I believe will change going forward, given the high focus on it in many branches lately.

5.1.4 Evaluation of the formal learning solution

All respondents did different kind of evaluations of their formal learning solutions, even though one expressed interestingly that she preferred to not follow up the trainings but rather the result they were aiming for. I think this is the ultimate follow-up, and it is also the most advanced level in the Kirkpatrick model.

The phases of *prototyping* and *testing* in design thinking is very much about evaluation. However, they are not about evaluating the end result, rather doing smaller evaluations often and further develop the training based on the new insights. Only one of the respondents used this approach to increase the quality. Design thinking is sometimes criticized for lacking clarity of how to integrate critique into the process (Butler, 2018). This I believe is an important critique since one of the strengths with the design thinking approach should be to learn from early insights and further develop the solution along the way.

5.1.5 Summary of result discussion

I can conclude that design thinking is not well known among the respondents in this research. Still many of the respondents are using some of the phases of design thinking unconsciously in their design of formal leadership development programs. It would be interesting to see how the quality of formal leadership development programs would be impacted by a more conscious and thorough use of design thinking. It is however not a given that it would increase the quality since the approach also is criticized for creating discomfort among the users and for taking time and energy at least initially.

As mentioned in chapter 1.2 and 1.3, the purpose of this thesis is to describe, and analyse whether design thinking, or parts of design thinking, today are used in the creation of formal leadership development. And in order to clarify the purpose further and to support the research the following research questions have been developed:

- What is design thinking?
- How is formal leadership development conducted and followed up today?
- How can design thinking influence how formal leadership development is conducted?

After conducting this research my conclusion is that the purpose and the research questions are fulfilled via the result, analysis and discussion above. It is, however, up to you as the reader to draw your own conclusion.

5.2 Discussion of the chosen method

The purpose with this chapter is to visualize the strengths and weaknesses with this research. I have chosen to cover the same headlines/topics as in chapter 3 Method, i.e. semi-structured interviews, interview guide, sample of respondents, conducting interviews, data processing and analysis, quality aspects and finally ethical aspects.

First, this study is anchored in a qualitative and hermeneutic approach, the reason for choosing this approach is that I wanted to understand on a deeper level how the chosen respondents were perceiving their companies work related to formal leadership development. A quantitative approach would not have given the detailed insights I was looking for in this research.

I believe that it was very good that a pilot interview was conducted as recommended by the supervisor of this thesis. This pilot interview increased the quality of the interview guide, and most important changed the approach from structured interviews to *semi-structured interviews*. This change gave more freedom to the respondents during the interviews which gave both a deeper and broader insight. I also believe that the decision to not analyse documents, in parallel with the interviews, were a correct decision since the interviews gave enough data and insights.

The *interview guide* turned out to contain more questions than what was needed for the analysis. If I would have been more experienced as researcher, I could probably have noticed this before the interviews were conducted and by that saved some time and energy from both myself and the respondents.

The *sample of respondents* has an impact on the validity of the research, and one could question if the number of interviews (6) were enough. Also if the fact that the respondents were employed in different positions (HR managers & Talent managers), and in companies in different branches have impacted the result. I cannot eliminate the risk that these factors have impacted the result and analysis of this thesis even though I deem it as unlikely.

I was, as mentioned, not recording when *conducting the interviews*. I believe that this has impacted the answers from the respondents in a positive way, such as outspokenness and honesty. But it also increases the risk of misinterpretations of their input. I have afterwards, in written, secured a correct understanding of the answers where I was in doubt. There is though always a risk that I have misunderstood an answer and been secure that I got it right and therefore not asked for a confirmation afterwards. The risk is small, but it exists. All interviews have been conducted in a consistent way, since I conducted all by myself, and this I see as a strength.

It is interesting to reflect upon if, and if so how, my pre-understanding of the topic has impacted the *data processing and analysis*. It is unavoidable to not involve my pre-understanding when analysing and coding the answers I have received. This is acceptable in the chosen method to a reasonable level. In this step of the research I believe it would have been beneficial to not work alone. This could have impacted the quality of the analysis positively, and minimized the risk for misunderstandings due to e.g. pre-understandings.

As mentioned in chapter 3.3 *quality aspects* such as reliability, validity and transferability are regarded in the research. I have high confidence in both the reliability and the validity while the ambition has not been to accomplish a transferable result. The result is purely reflecting the experiences and perceptions from the chosen respondents.

Finally, this thesis is compliant with the *ethical aspects* mentioned in chapter 3.3.1. This means that the four main principles/requirements stated by Vetenskapsrådet are considered and followed.

In summary, even though the chosen method has its pros and cons I feel confident that the research is credible.

5.3 Future research

During the work with this thesis several questions has been raised that would be interesting to research further. It would be interesting to conduct studies among managers/leaders who attend formal leadership development programs that have been developed with the use of design thinking. Would these trainings be more appreciated and add more value to the organisations or not?

It would also be interesting to conduct studies among employees whose managers have attended leadership trainings that have been developed with the use of design thinking. Would these employees notice a different development of their manager or not?

Finally, it would also be of interest to further research how design thinking would possibly impact other HR processes such as recruitment, compensation and benefits.

5.4 Final remarks

It has been interesting and developing to conduct this thesis. Based on this research it is obvious that design thinking is (still) a quite unknown approach to solve problems within HR. The approach would probably add value in different HR processes, like for example when developing formal leadership development programs, but it is also clear that it will bring new challenges like for example a heavy time consumption or the mentioned discomfort among its users.

The future will show if design thinking will enter the HR stage to a greater extent or not.

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Appendix 1, Interview guide (in Swedish)

1. Inledning

- Berätta kort vem du är?
- Vilken position har du?
- Berätta kort om ditt uppdrag.

2. Kontext

- Beskriv kort vad ditt företag gör.
- Vad är era chefers primära ansvar?
- Hur många chefer ingår i ditt ansvarsområde?
- Var är ”dina” chefer placerade?
- Beskriv hur ni jobbar med ledarskapsutveckling inom ert företag.
- Fokuserar ni på ledarskapsutveckling även för medarbetare som inte är i en chefsposition?

3. Identifiering av behov

- Hur vet ni vad ni ska fokusera på i er ledarskapsutveckling?
- Vem är det som avgör vad ni ska fokusera på i er ledarskapsutveckling?
- Vad baseras dessa beslut på?

4. Design

- Beskriv hur ni rent konkret går från identifierat behov till någon form av ”lär-lösning”.
- Vem är ansvarig respektive involverad i detta arbete?
- Hur iterativt jobbar ni i designfasen av era ”lär-lösningar”?
- Hur beskriver ni vad ni vill uppnå med er ”lär-lösning”?
- Använder ni ”design thinking”, eller delar av ”design thinking” i detta arbete? Och i så fall hur?

5. Genomförande

- Vem är det i slutändan som levererar er ”lär-lösning”?
- Varför levereras ”lär-lösning” av denna/dessa personer?
- Levereras oftast ”lär-lösningen” i ett fysiskt eller digitalt möte, eller i en kombination?
- Vad är det som avgör ifall ”lär-lösningen” ska levereras fysiskt, digitalt eller i en kombination?

6. Utvärdering

- Hur utvärderar ni effekterna av era ”lär-lösningar”?
- Vad är det ni utvärderar?
- När gör ni denna utvärdering?

7. Övrigt

- Vilka trender ser ni idag när det kommer till ledarskapsutveckling?
- Har ni något ytterligare att tillägga?



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