



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

# Keeping the balance of professionalism and friendship

*A qualitative study of young officers in the Danish Defence*

by

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# Abstract

- Title:** Keeping the balance of professionalism and friendship - A qualitative study of young officers in the Danish Defence
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- Course:** BUSN49, Degree Project in Master's Programme Managing People, Knowledge and Change, Business Administration, 15 ECTS
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- Purpose:** This research examines how young officers of the Danish Defence navigate the boundaries between leadership and personal relationships in an environment based on hierarchy and asymmetrical leadership. The study aims to increase our understanding of the practical nuances of balancing leadership and friendly relations as part of the officers' leadership efforts.
- Methodology:** This research study is qualitative and abductive in nature, following the interpretive approach. The empirical data has been collected at one case organization and consists of eight semi-structured interviews. In addition, a document analysis of the Danish Defense's leadership training handbook for new officers has been conducted to support the interview data.
- Theoretical perspectives:** Our theoretical perspectives draw upon the leadership theories in examining the differences in the low and high relational distance between leaders and followers. Additionally, this paper discusses the significance of the leadership approaches in a military context and the influence of power in leadership.
- Contributions:** Our study contributes to the literature by giving a deeper understanding of how young officers of the Danish Defence balance personal relations with their leadership efforts. On a wider level, we provide a springboard to adding nuances to the existing leadership ideals with a focus on the practical implications when combining low and high relational distance leadership.
- Key words:** distance, leadership, friendship, hierarchy, military, officer

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We hope you will enjoy the reading of our study.

*Sara Serjamaa & Helena Thorøe*

Lund, May 21st, 2021

## Abbreviations

TDD                      The Danish Defence

## Definitions

Young leaders              Refers to commissioned officers of the Danish Defence from the age of 23 to 32.

Officer                      The term is used to refer to the military rank of a commissioned officer in the Danish Defence holding a managerial position and responsibility of a platoon or unit.

Subordinate                Applies to military employees with a lower rank than commissioned officers, such as sergeant, private, or corporal.

Unit                         Unit is used interchangeably for both a platoon and company.

The Academy               Refers to the Royal Danish Military Academy as well as the Royal Danish Naval Academy which both educates commissioned officers for the Royal Danish Military. To honor anonymity, 'the Academy' is used interchangeably.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1. Background

*“It's not that we have some sort of special commander-aura around us.  
We're just ordinary people with the same level of emotion and the  
same need for cordial relations.” - Oliver, officer in the Danish Defence*

The Danish Defence (hereafter TDD), as a military organization, traditionally presents itself as a highly authoritarian workplace, dependent on its clearly defined structures and emphasis on high hierarchical distance between its members. However, during the past decade TDD has been undergoing significant transformations due to its struggle to maintain personnel as in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, a critical number of employees were fleeing the organization (Forsvarsministeriet, 2007; Funch, 2009). The reason should, among others, be found in the core of the organizational culture, established upon authoritarian and controlling principles in which an excessive discipline and respect for hierarchy was driving employees away (Forsvarsministeriet, 2007; Funch, 2009). Moreover, this is a culture in great contrast to the values of contemporary young individuals embracing a social culture alongside independence of free will and responsibility (Forsvarsministeriet, 2007). The traditional principles of TDD are then rather adverse to the values of young individuals of today's society. Nevertheless, during the last decade, TDD has managed to turn the ship around, making itself an attractive organization for young individuals by redefining its education and organizational culture (Berlingske, 2020; Forsvarsministeriet, 2007).

Despite the turnaround, and the efforts to increase TDD's attractiveness in the eyes of future employees, one would not initially consider the working conditions to allow friendships to flourish between colleagues and even less so, between military leaders and subordinates. Hence, the interest to further examine the relationships surrounded by strong hierarchical distance was sparked when imagining the role of new and inexperienced leaders in the military, namely the newly educated officers. As a group, the recently graduated officers present an interesting



perspective in this as they do not yet possess the practical experience or know-how to approach hierarchical relations, especially towards subordinates. Given their rather young age, commonly under the age of 29, they could also be associated with a heightened need to connect with their unit members, feelings of belongingness, and thus, appreciate cordial relations to their colleagues as social beings (Forsvarsministeriet, 2007). Furthermore, as the officers' subordinates are commonly around the same age, perhaps sharing similar motivations to join the military alongside the long periods of time spent together during various exercises or deployments, it might make it difficult for the officers to avoid forming friendly relations with their subordinates, even if instructed to interact through strong authoritarian distance by TDD. Thus, we found this contrast intriguing and wanted to study more in-depth how the young officers juggle their personal relations in a highly asymmetrical setting.

Further, we acknowledged great importance at the young age of the officers and what their insights as emerging leaders could add to the existing leadership theories, still leaning heavily on the theories invented decades ago (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). According to Anderson, Baur, Griffith, and Buckley (2016), young leaders have the potential to bring new opportunities and challenges to the table, hence questioning the way things have been done before. This idea was possible to receive more thorough attention in the military environment, which, compared to other organizations, has not the same flexibility to adapt as quickly to leadership trends or other societal movements given the bureaucratic nature. When looking into the field of leadership to support our interest in examining the idea further, we found a similar contrast to exist between the clearly separated approaches of low and high distance in leader-follower relations as well as between the images of the ideal leader and what this image looks like in reality. It is puzzling to us why the current field has not addressed more the practical implications of combining various leadership approaches as well as the challenges this might inflict.

Thus, we found it necessary to deep-dive in the distinguished concepts within leadership to discover how officers might simultaneously utilize aspects of friendly leadership, allowing themselves to conduct 'buddy' like stance towards their subordinates (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010), as well as charismatic and transformational leadership, highlighting the leader's superior

position (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1998). Moreover, as the military environment allows the use of discipline and authority to thrive within its structures (Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003), the aspects of power must be considered also from the leadership perspective, presenting essential means to reach organizational goals (Cairns, 2017; Pfeffer, 1992). Thus, these contradictions leave us with a need to advance our knowledge in the field of leadership studies, on the combination of leadership approaches between high and low distance in leader-follower relations, particularly in terms of their in-practice implications.

## 1.2 Problematization

The concept of leadership and the leader-follower relationship has received much attention among scholars over the last many decades (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017; Kets de Vries, 1994). For the most part, leadership scholars are eager to scrutinize the positive outcomes successful leadership efforts may produce (Mintzberg, 2012; Burns, 2003) and given the complexity of their definitions, fall in a gap of oversimplifications instead of considering more in-depth their practical implications (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Moreover, as stated above, the field does not to a large extent address the possibility to combine various leadership approaches. The reason for this may again be found in the way current literature tends to discuss leadership as highly complex, being unable to reach a consensus for the definition (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017; Kets de Vries, 1994). Instead, it focuses on discussing leadership through a rather one-dimensional lens where low and high distance in leader-follower relationships are distinguished from each other.

Furthermore, the aspect of how personal relations are juggled in an asymmetrical setting has been neglected and only represents a small finger to the body of literature addressing leadership (Hays, 1989; Taylor, Hanlon, & Boyd, 1992). This is despite several opportunities as well as challenges that have been connected to the workplace relationships (Methot, LePine, Podsakoff & Christian, 2016; Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002; Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). The narrow scope of the literature treating this aspect is limited and, therefore, we find it important to develop and expand on the theoretical concepts in leadership, also to further shed light on the perspective of young leaders. Thus, instead of separating notions of leadership, their interplay

should be better understood, especially when discussing the practical implications and the possible challenges for the leaders to simultaneously maintain their personal and professional relations.

### 1.3 Purpose and research question

The aim of this study is to challenge the theoretical concepts of high- and low-distance leadership in leader-follower relations and expand on the literature to take the practical complexities into account. Further, we want to learn and understand the perspective of young officers and the leadership abilities they develop in the extreme environment that the military is. Therefore, we aim to explore the nuances of professionals establishing the capabilities that make them navigate the boundaries of leadership and personal relations in an environment based on hierarchy and asymmetrical relations. Formulated to contribute to the existing work within the field of leadership in management and organizational studies, along with the identified phenomenon of young officers' development, we propose the following research question:

*How do young officers balance the different roles of a leader and a friend in the Danish Defence?*

### 1.4 Thesis outline

Following this introductory chapter, we continue the thesis by focusing our attention on the central literature in management and organization studies considering leadership. With the distance between leaders and followers as our focal point, we review the existing literature in **chapter 2** to provide our study with supportive concepts for our empirical findings. In **chapter 3** we explain the methodology of our study and how we approached the collection of empirical material as well as our analysis. We further raise the reflections and limitations molding our method and results, before we move on to **chapter 4** which portrays our empirical findings. The fourth chapter explores the insights from our interviews and document study in accordance with

our research question with a focus on the two central findings. The first finding discusses the importance of close relations for the officers to maintain as leaders in order to enhance the unit's performance and, thus, work as effectively as possible to execute the task. Following this, the second finding illustrates how the use of friendliness in the officers' relationships with subordinates was harder in practice which resulted in the use of power to maintain a high relational distance. In **chapter 5** we discuss the empirical findings in relation to the existing literature on leadership to address the misalignment between the ideal leadership as clearly separated between high- and low-level distance in leader-follower relations. This is in contrast to reality, where our findings showcased overlapping of high and low relational distance, as well as nuances of combining various leadership approaches as part of the officers' balancing act between leadership and friendship. The final chapter, **chapter 6**, concludes and summarizes our main findings and theoretical contributions. In this finishing chapter, we further put forward proposals for future research that we uncovered during our work. In the appendix, we have included a list of interviewees and the interview guide.

## 2 Literature review

*As stated above, our study focuses on the abilities of young officers in TDD. Therefore, this literature review presents supportive concepts for the deeper understanding of officers' attributes in their balancing act between friendliness and professionalism as part of their leadership. In order to do so, we will present the appropriate literature through the lens of distance, scrutinizing the spectrum of leadership approaches between low- and high-level distance, which this delicate balancing act requires. By referring to the distance lens, we imply the perspective to examine leader-follower relations and the level of relational distance between them. Hence, the low-level distance applies when the relation between leaders and followers is close, near to egalitarian, whereas a high-distance relation signifies an asymmetrical, authoritarian approach where the superior's position is clearly mirroring a leader. Firstly, we will briefly introduce the conceptualization of leadership and clarify the difference between various terms related to the role of an officer. Secondly, we will explore the very low-distance leadership through friendships and cover the metaphor of 'buddy' leadership. Thirdly, this literature review will proceed to discuss the high-distance leadership embracing charismatic as well as transformational and transactional leadership. After reviewing the literature through the distance lens, the latter part of the chapter will address military leadership and the extent of the transactional and transformational approach in this environment. This will be followed by the exploitation of power and its influence in leadership, before ending the chapter with a concluding summary.*

### 2.1 Leadership and its distinction to management and command

*"Leadership is one of the most widely talked about subjects and at the same time one of the most elusive and puzzling"* (Wren, 1995, p. 27). In order to make sense of young officers and their balancing act between personal relations and leadership in TDD, it is important to reflect on the relationship between leaders and followers within the vast amount of literature available on leadership studies. In general, the environment, referring to different organizations and

industries, plays a key role in determining the need for leadership (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Thus, given the authoritarian environment TDD represents, the clearly defined relationship between leaders and followers becomes key in underpinning the adequate leadership nuances.

According to Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017), leadership can be defined as *“influencing ideas, meanings, understandings and identities of others within an asymmetrical (unequal) relational context”* (p. 3). However, Burns (1978) on the other hand, with his book *Leadership* presents a more established perspective as one of the most distinguished researchers in the field. By leadership, he refers to *“leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers”* (Burns, 1978, p.19). The basic idea, however, remains the same: leadership is perceived as good and desirable, positioning leaders in a heroic light (Mintzberg, 2012; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017).

Before proceeding, some central definitions within leadership terminology are important to address to fully grasp the concepts, namely the terms leadership, management, and command. Firstly, management is commonly associated with administrative work tasks, such as planning, monitoring, and controlling, whereas leadership is perceived as the means to create and manage symbolic meanings that engage followers (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). This is exemplified in the work of Zaleznik (1977) who strongly distinguishes the terms by arguing that the substantial difference between leaders and managers is further evident in their understanding and perceptions they possess. Yet, according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), leadership and management often overlap in practice and, thus, leadership is regularly included as part of management. In other words, theory can be seen as rather simplified as the superior is often in charge of creating solutions to challenges, yet approaching the issues with different perspectives on the appropriate actions (Grint, 2005).

However, further distinctions are made by Grint (2005; 2008), who identified management and leadership as forms of authority and added the dimension of command as the third form:

*“these three forms of authority are ... another way of suggesting that the role of those responsible for decision-making is charged with finding the appropriate Answer, Process and Question to address the problem respectively” (Grint, 2005, p. 1475).*

Grint (2005) claims that management solves problems by providing the applicable process, leadership by asking relevant questions, and command by instantly giving the correct answer. Thus, the appropriate use of power between these three forms is dependent on the uncertainty of the problems faced (Grint, 2005). By utilizing Rittel and Webber’s (1973) work on ‘tame’ and ‘wicked’ problems, Grint (2005) further argues management to tackle tame, difficult yet solvable matters with low uncertainty whereas leaders deal with wicked problems, more complex issues where no already known solutions exist, with a strong level of uncertainty. Instead, command is utilized in case of critical problems, e.g., in crisis situations, where there is no level of uncertainty regarding what needs to be done, hence the commander’s role is to give the correct answer as quickly as possible (Grint, 2005). However, in practice, the person in charge of solving the issue can, and most likely will, utilize and apply more than one of the three modes of authority (i.e., management, leadership, and command), as the nature of the problem may develop and change between tame, wicked, and critical (Grint, 2005; Rittel & Webber, 1973).

With this overview of the disclosed key definitions (i.e., leadership, management, and command), we have established the necessary grounds to further narrow the scope. This literature review will thus continue to examine and discuss leadership from the perspective of a distance lens: first, the low distance through friendships as part of leadership and second, the high distance through charismatic, transactional, and transformational leadership, before finishing with the significance of transformational and transactional leadership in a military environment, along with the use of power.

## 2.2. Low distance relationships in an organizational context

This section is divided into two subsections assessing the dyads mirroring a low relational distance. These dyads symbolize relationships where the bond is close and there is, more or less, power symmetry between the individuals. Thus, in the first subsection, we review the literature

on friendships in an organizational context and the effects of a personal relationship between superior and subordinate. The next subsection increases the distance slightly by looking at the relationship between a ‘buddy’ leader and a follower and comparing the characteristics to a friendship.

### 2.2.1. The benefits and challenges of workplace friendships

This literature review will now take a closer look through the distance lens and discuss the closer relations of friendship as part of leadership, its connection to emotional intelligence and address some of the challenges and benefits of this particular approach of lower distance.

Friendships in a workplace setting entail more than a number of individuals involved in a friendly, polite, or cooperative interaction. According to Song & Olshfski (2008), the definition of a friendship is “*the positive bond between two people*” which further “*involves a voluntary and amiable relationship that includes support for each other's social and emotional goals and a feeling of equality between members*” (Song & Olshfski, 2008, p. 150). Although Berman, West & Richter Jr (2002) recognize the element of symmetry and voluntary support, they argue that the relationship too has to involve trust as well as shared interests or values. If the friendship is not manifested in shared interests or values, it will flee once the common ground of a work-related activity ceases (Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002). However, the slightly divergent definitions mirror a complex discussion as friendships are multiplexed and often vary in intensity. Yet, the elements of a voluntary and amiable relation could also be argued to resemble a relationship between a heroic leader and a follower (Unsworth, Kragt & Johnston-Billings, 2018; Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002). However, Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) recognize the centrality of such a dyad to instead be rather asymmetrical and hierarchical in nature. While researchers are somewhat divided in the definition, a shared personalistic orientation seems to be the core of a workplace friendship in lieu of solely perceiving one another as occupiers of a particular role (Sias & Cahill, 1998).

The body of literature treating workplace friendships further suggests that the relationships represent positive as well as negative effects in regard to work performance. On the one hand,



friendships have been connected to positive performance outcomes, such as more open communication and inclusiveness among employees as well as an increased ability for leaders to influence follower-friends (Hays, 1989; Taylor, Hanlon, & Boyd, 1992). However, on the other hand, critical findings are suggesting that friendships between colleagues are negative. A number of studies have identified how employees may get exhausted by maintaining the relationship (Methot, LePine, Podsakoff & Christian, 2016; Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002). The researchers further found that employees get distracted from work-related activities and that merit-based decision-making is sometimes undermined (Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002). Similarly, friendships between leaders and followers have been linked to favoritism and manipulation (Taylor, Hanlon, & Boyd, 1992). Thus, friendships between colleagues have been demonstrated to affect the performance of a team in both negative and positive ways. Nevertheless, they may be inevitable as humans are by nature social beings.

In addition, Sveningsson and Blom (2010) address the superior-subordinate friendships from a critical perspective, questioning the impact on the followers' and leaders' self-esteem as the relationship may create an endless need for confirmation for both parties as a cause to norms of positive feedback-loops. Support for this can be found in Boyd and Taylor's work (1998) as they argue the close superior-subordinate friendships to include the risk of exposing "*extreme dependency*" (p. 17). From the leader's perspective, the uncertainty of not knowing how well or poorly they have performed as leaders can culminate in subordinates' feedback, especially if the feedback is positive and contributes to the feeling of being liked (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). This could be seen as a general issue irrespective of leadership, however, similar insecurities are identified for the subordinates. The continuous recognition of leaders may overemphasize, resulting in a distorted image of work success occurring only through rather symbolic superior attention (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Moreover, the close relationship between leaders and followers in the 'buddy'-like relationship can be challenging when leaders need to make a shift in tone, embracing the authoritarian role of a leader, exercising discipline, or when ending friendships with subordinates (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010; Boyd & Taylor, 1998). It may then be a complicated dyad with awkward and tangled decisions if the distance between leader and follower is rather low and expected to be somewhat prioritized.

### 2.2.2. The emotional bond between a ‘buddy’ leader and a follower

The nature of friendly relationships between leaders and followers is further examined by Sveningsson and Blom (2010), who refer to the metaphor of “*leaders as buddies*” (p. 96). According to the authors, the development behind the ‘befriending’ as part of leadership in organizations has emerged through the increased interest in “*therapeutic culture, emotional management and coaching*” (p. 96) which can ultimately cultivate motivation, loyalty and, thus, drive employee performance. The increased desire to engage motivation through friendly and considerate actions by superiors, such as greeting subordinates with their names and having time for small talk, can also be recognized in leaders’ behavior as ‘servant leaders’, implying the leaders’ emotional intelligence and abilities to increase feelings of safeness and belongingness towards the organization (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010, p. 97). The value of embracing emotional intelligence and feelings as part of leadership is also recognized by George (2000) who defines emotional intelligence, based on the works of Mayer and Salovey (1993; 1995; 1997), to include “*the appraisal and expression of emotion, the use of motivation to enhance cognitive process and decision making, knowledge about emotions and management of emotions*” (p. 1034). Thus, the capabilities to understand and possibly manage subordinates’ emotions can enhance the effectiveness of leadership activities, e.g., by enabling leaders to foster enthusiasm, support confidence to solve problems independently, and embrace trust by focusing on personal relationships with individuals (George, 2000).

Therefore, the elements of a friendly relation, such as in the ‘buddy’ leadership notion, and the definition of a friendship are fundamentally different. While emotional intelligence in ‘buddy’ leadership appears to be motivated by ‘enhancing’ work-related activities and contributing to the organizational objectives, a friendship has earlier been described to be grounded in a personalistic orientation in which shared interests or values are connecting the individuals aside from a common work activity (George, 2000; Sveningsson & Blom, 2010; Song & Olshfski, 2008; Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002). The central differentiation seems further grounded in a more asymmetrical relationship between a ‘buddy’ leader and a follower in contrast to the symmetrical relationship between two friends (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010; Song & Olshfski, 2008; Berman, West & Richter Jr, 2002).

However, Sveningsson and Blom (2010) identify the friendliness practiced by leaders to emerge through four leadership activities: “*cheering, including, being there and safeguarding*” (p. 99). ‘Cheering’ includes embracing the role of a party-host and ensuring all subordinates are happy at work, therefore strengthening the emotional bond in leader-follower relationships and establishing loyalty (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Instead, ‘including’ refers to leaders creating opportunities for subordinates to participate in and by feeling included, enjoy greater well-being and commitment, whereas ‘being there’ implies leaders acknowledging subordinates by listening and being available for them (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Lastly, ‘safeguarding’ occurs when leaders protect their subordinates from higher-level requests in the organizations, such as bureaucratic tasks, allowing subordinates to work with their more relevant and possibly interesting work responsibilities (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Overall, the ‘buddy’ leadership in all these forms aims to contribute to the well-being of subordinates and maintain feelings of happiness, with the ultimate goal of high performance achieved by subordinates surpassing expectations and going beyond their work tasks (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010; Liden & Graen, 1980). Thus, ‘buddy’ leadership treats aspects of the more personal relationship between leaders and followers. Even if the dyad mirrors a very slight relational distance and asymmetry, the relationship may look like that of a friendship and foster several of the same elements, such as emotional support and trust, among others.

### 2.3 High leader-follower distance in leadership

After scrutinizing the close relationships, we will adjust the lens to see the wider view of the organizational scene. This will reveal the asymmetrical relationships representing the greater relational distance in which the leader clearly possesses a grandiose role for the follower. We begin the first subsection by covering the concept of a charismatic leader and the effect on followers. In the later subsection, we consider transformational as well as transactional leadership and what it means for the surroundings.

### 2.3.1. The motivation of a charismatic leader for followers

The concept of charismatic leadership by House (1977) and Weber (1947) can be seen as essential when discussing leadership embracing a high distance. As a term, charismatic leadership can be described as creating a compelling vision for the organization by utilizing powerful, rhetorically rich, and personal communication to increase commitment among followers (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Charismatic leaders are associated with individuals having specific traits that enable them to influence and embrace loyalty among followers, such as strong self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities as well as a desire for power (Yukl, 1993; Bryman, 1993; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Thus, the charismatic leader can be perceived to possess a rather heroic role in which followers are admiring the leader from the foot of the pedestal. Moreover, the concept of charismatic leaders was further researched by Bass in a military context (1985a) where he discovered successful charismatic leaders in the military to be able to create enthusiasm towards tasks and exercises, increasing loyalty and respect among their subordinates. The military leaders of his study also demonstrated “*a special gift of seeing what was really important, and who had a sense of mission that excited responses.*” (Bass, 1985a, p. 34).

In essence, Bass’ claims of charismatic leaders demonstrate how the success of a military unit, or other types of organization, can become the “*symbols of success*” (Bass, 1985a, p. 34). Thus, on the one hand, a leader's confirmation and recognition become crucial for followers to achieve (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). On the other hand, the high expectations of followers can increase pressure to perform successfully and in case of a failure, have a negative effect on the followers' respect and commitment towards the leader (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). In addition, the highlighted role of charismatic leaders may increase narcissistic characteristics of the leader as well as culminate power dimensions within the organization (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). However, as Bryman (1993) and Weber (1968) point out, “*charismatic leaders can lose their charisma*” (Bryman, 1993, p. 298) if they are unsuccessful in providing benefits for their subordinates. Therefore, it appears that the benefits of charismatic leadership can only be achieved through a delicate balancing act where the organization needs to be careful of overly embracing the approach (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Hence, the charismatic leader is on the pinnacle of leadership while often

undermining input to rather inject followers with his or her unique and admirable character as motivation for the given task.

### 2.3.2. Transformational and transactional leadership and its relation to power distance

The roots of transformational and transactional leadership can be traced to Burns (1978). His work is developed in a business context by Bass (1998), and Avolio and Bass (2002), who further gave rise to the concept of transformational leadership from Burns' (1978; 2003) earlier work. According to Burns (1978), power presents an essential part of leadership, which can be detected in all interactions between two individuals. Hence, both transactional and transformational leadership include the use of power in different ways. Transactional leadership can be described as a leaders' recognition of the required actions followers need to perform in order to achieve desired outcomes (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985a; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). This implies an authoritarian relationship between leaders and followers in which the leader is clearly in control and has the power to monitor work (Bass, Avolio, Jung & Berson, 2003). By doing so, the transactional leader can also acknowledge *“subordinates' needs and wants and clarify how they will be satisfied if necessary efforts are made”* (Bass, 1985a, p. 28). Thus, transactional leadership is built upon a relationship of exchange as the leader provides rewards to motivate the follower in return for work performance. However, Bass (1985a) has also been criticizing transactional leadership as it often fails due to leaders' inability to deliver the promised recognition, hence, making the leaders appear ineffective among subordinates. In practice, managers may then overlook transactional leadership efforts if the organization utilizes noncontingent rewards, meaning rewarding employees for accomplishing tasks, no matter how well or poorly subordinates perform (Bass, 1985a; Kellerman, 1984).

However, the fundamental aspect of exchange in the transactional approach is in great contrast to the essence of transformational leadership which, according to Bass (1985b), is grounded in an:

*“attempt and succeed in raising colleagues, subordinates, followers ... to a greater awareness about the issues of consequence. This heightening of awareness requires a*

*leader with vision, self confidence, and inner strength to argue successfully for what he [sic] sees is right or good, not for what is popular or is acceptable according to established wisdom of the time.” (p. 17)*

Transformational leadership thus focuses on engaging followers’ motivation whenever interactions between individuals occur and is based on more than merely the followers’ efforts to achieve obliged tasks (Burns, 1978; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Moreover, transformational leaders can motivate followers to surpass expectations as the quote above indicates (Bass, 1985a). According to Bass (1985a), this process of transformation can be achieved through three stages: firstly, through expanding our thinking to comprehend the “*value of designated outcomes and ways of reaching these outcomes*” (p. 31) and secondly, refocusing our self-interest for the behalf of the organization. Thirdly, the leader is able to increase the need level on Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, such as “*from security to the need of recognition*” (Bass, 1985a, p. 31). Yet scholars, such as Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) as well as Kellerman (1984), claim that successful transformational leadership is bound to the leaders’ abilities to adjust and react according to followers’ invariably changing expectations. This implies that not all leaders possess the capabilities to practice transformational leadership, even if embraced by the organization. Hence, the transformational leader is a rather exceptional individual.

Similarly, Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) claim the transactional and transformational theories of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985b) to lack the effects of personality differences or motivational factors between leaders. Also, Yukl in his work (1999; 2006) questioned the “*universal leader attributes*” (2006, p. 273) for transformational leaders, implying that the leadership efforts required might vary according to the situation. In addition, the required four elements of transformational leaders by Bass and Avolio (2000), can be quite demanding to achieve in practice (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). These four elements include influencing followers as role models, providing motivation, stimulating creativity by pushing followers to challenge their thinking, and treating followers as individuals with their own and personal needs (Bass and Avolio, 2000; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). The transformational leader can thus appear to be somewhat idolized by his or her capabilities in which followers become willing to go the extra mile. However, as Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) point out, some

followers might prefer meaningful work tasks or established relations to co-workers over the efforts of a leader continuously trying to motivate and engage them.

Nevertheless, the centrality of transformational leadership seems focused on evolving individuals within the organization according to the leader's vision (Bass, 1985b; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Although this is in slight contrast to charismatic leadership, where followers are revolving around the persona of the leader, there are significant parallels to be drawn between the two leadership styles (Yukl, 1993; Bryman, 1993; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Transformational, as well as charismatic leaders, are both possessing a heroic role in which subordinates are following and bending for their will (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Hence, the distance to followers is high even if the leaders provide a rather soft relational approach in regards to the support of followers.

The relational distance is similar to the transactional dimension although the follower should be compensated for their work efforts (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985a; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Compared to the previously described leadership approaches, the relationship between the transactional leader and follower is rather dual and reciprocal in nature. This prevents the extreme dependency among followers continuously yearning for recognition as earlier indicated for the charismatic and transformational leader (Bass and Avolio, 2000; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). The transactional leadership style can therefore be seen to focus on the task and highlighting more the interest for the organization, whereas the charismatic and transformational leadership approach is centered around the leader.

Further, the interest in studying transactional and transformational leadership in a hierarchical setting has received plenty of attention in the field (Bass et al., 2003; Squires & Peach, 2020) and is exemplified in the work by Bass (1998), conducting several of his research projects in the military environment. Thus, we will proceed to examine military leadership in which we will assess the extent of their influence. Lastly, this will be followed by the effect of power in leadership.

## 2.4. The significance of transformational and transactional leadership in a military environment

Heretofore, we have reviewed the literature on workplace relationships through the lens of distance. The latter part of the chapter will explore leadership in the context of military conditions with a critical lens on the earlier distinctions scrutinized.

Early on, military success has been studied in connection to leadership, as according to Bass, this has been viewed as crucial to differentiate the defeating forces from the weaker performing forces in the military context “*since records have been kept*” (1990b, p. 9). Today, the military portrays “*an interesting blend of tradition and change*” (Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003, p. 686) as the values of military leadership are affected by the societal movements and “*depend on the practical experiences of the men and women embodying the military organization*” (Brænder & Holsting, 2020, p. 2). Hence, while the military was traditionally oriented towards the task, the different notions on leadership play a larger role now than earlier. In general, military leadership includes the same aspects as any other leadership alignment including targets, people interactions, and the necessity to accomplish tasks (Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020).

However, the environment of the battlefield contributes to generating higher demands for the leaders as their leadership skills will not only affect the accomplishment of the task but “*the very survival of their subordinates*” (Rozčenkova & Dimdiņš, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the military is based on clearly defined hierarchical structures, levels, and ranks which enables the use of power across its operations. Moreover, the departments within the military, such as naval, armed, and air forces, can be detected to each have their own cultures and somewhat distinct perspectives on leadership (Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003). Therefore, the central point, in any case, concerns the ability to prioritize and adapt one’s role to the circumstances and conditions, further divided between *garrison leadership*, implying well-being and training of the subordinates, and *combat leadership*, which centralizes on accomplishing the mission (Hunt & Phillips, 1991; Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020; Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003). This encompasses a variety of competencies an officer needs to practice, including the principles of military pedagogy by shifting between the roles of an instructor, disciplinarian, personnel technician, etc. (Pennington, Hough & Case,



1943) as well as the roles of a caretaker, developer, and warrior-leader (Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003). Several scholars like Squires & Peach (2020) argue that the flexibility between roles is essential to achieve balance for the shifting demands.

Essentially, this encourages the ability to efficiently utilize a combination of approaches and prioritize between transformational and transactional leadership (Bass et al., 2003; Squires & Peach, 2020). However, these two dimensions can further be supported by a third dimension, *relations*, in connection with authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005) to cover a broader scope of situations military leaders are faced with (Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020; Ekvall, 1991; Yukl, Gordon & Taber, 2002). As indicated earlier, the first dimension of task (Ekvall, 1991) enables military leaders to harness transactional leadership activities to apply clear commands and provide defined accountabilities for the subordinates, utilizing rather directive forms of power to different exchange of benefits in the superior-subordinate relationship (Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020; Bass, 1990a). The second dimension of change (Ekvall, 1991), refers to the military leaders' transformational efforts to enhance subordinates' commitment in which the power aspect is more empowering (Pierro, Raven, Amato & Belanger, 2013). Lastly, the third dimension of relations (Ekvall, 1991) focuses on the leaders' use of authentic leadership capabilities to create trust among subordinates (Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005).

However, above all, the military is commonly known to represent a combat milieu. Although a combination of roles is essential, transactional leadership provides a relevant approach when the mission is in focus (Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020). This is further underpinned as the heroic nature of earlier described leadership approaches, such as the charismatic and transformational, only applies so long as the subordinates are subjugated to the role as followers and validate the leader with an idolized position (Bryman, 1993; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Hence, in a military environment, the transactional leadership may then be more stable than the heroic approaches, as the subordinates are clearly compensated for their efforts which similarly implies greater reciprocity in regards to the outcome for both parties.

## 2.5. The influence of power in leadership

Another essential aspect of leadership and its overarching purpose of influencing followers is the leverage of power. The term itself has a negative connotation and individuals utilizing power are often associated with authoritarian, dictatorial, duplicitous, and narcissistic characteristics (Cairns, 2017; Pfeffer, 1992). Nevertheless, power is frequently regarded in research as “... *an important social process that is often required to get things accomplished in interdependent systems.*” (Pfeffer, 1992, p. 35; Cairns, 2017, French & Raven, 1959). The importance of power as a medium in the exercise of leadership is thus impossible to ignore. Power has influence potential and may work as an effective approach for superiors trying to motivate subordinates and their behavior to perform for the objectives or in line with the principles of the organization in general. This is further recognized by Cairns (2017) arguing that “*power can be used to persuade others at different levels of the organization to achieve predetermined goals, positive outcomes, and greater productivity to drive the organization’s future success.*” (Cairns, 2017, p. 10). Pfeffer (1992) further supports this by highlighting the importance of exercising power as essential to good management.

The leverage of power has been studied for decades in which early researchers like the social psychologists French & Raven (1959) identified five bases of power; legitimate, reward, expert, referent, and coercive. The forms of power each have different modes varying from rather commanding or directive, such as the coercive style, to more empowering, such as the rewarding style. Similarly, Cairns (2017) emphasizes two motives of exercising power to be either self-serving or responsible. Although the author stresses that neither of the manners itself depicts whether a manager is a good or a bad leader, McClelland & Burnham (2003) argue that a good leader’s “*power motivation is not oriented toward personal aggrandizement but toward the institution that he or she serves.*” (McClelland & Burnham, 2003, p. 121). Orientation toward the institution or organization, they found, is often a result of managers who are less concerned about affiliation and more focused on power and being in control (McClelland & Burnham, 2003). The corollary of these characteristics is a manager who is better at motivating subordinates and creating clear organizational procedures (McClelland & Burnham, 2003). Hence, some researchers on power acknowledge that leveraging the medium is not necessarily as negative as often associated.

Although this perspective is repeatedly recognized, Pfeffer (1992) maintains that power and influence can also be acquired for evil purposes. This is similarly supported by Cairns (2017), stressing that power has to be exercised effectively in order not to create power struggles and conflicts in which a manager coerces his or her will on others. The central point in power seems, however, that it is established upon a hierarchy in which a number of individuals are dominating others. Therefore, power is a medium that is commonly perceived to be allocated to the individuals at the top although this only exists so long as it is granted by the individuals it affects (Cairns, 2017). Thus, power can be reasoned to be a relational measure and be held only by the individuals who, directly or indirectly, have been allowed by others (Cairns, 2017).

However, managers with power at the top of the hierarchy cannot reach the divisional or organizational goals solely by themselves (McClelland & Burnham, 2003). Hence, the performance of subordinates is a crucial element of an organizational success causing power to become a significant medium to influence. It further places power motivation at a foreground in which it should be anchored in a desire to have an impact and be influential rather than to achieve personal needs (McClelland & Burnham, 2003; Cairns, 2017).

## 2.6 Summary of the theoretical concepts

To conclude, this literature review has presented supportive concepts to begin analyzing the delicate balancing act between friendliness and leadership young officers of TDD are faced with as part of their leadership. We began this chapter by laying out the theoretical base of leadership and key definitions. Following that, the literature review aimed to increase the understanding of leadership through a lens of distance, placing friendliness in the low end of distance and various forms of leadership in the high end of the spectrum. The second section thus discovered the benefits and challenges of friendships as part of leadership by further deepening our knowledge on ‘buddy’ leadership (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010) and its connection with emotional intelligence (George, 2000). Later, the third section identified the role of charismatic leadership (House, 1977; Weber, 1947) along with transformational and transactional leadership (Burns, 1978) to be a necessary aspect when discussing high-distance relations. Finally, the fourth

section focused on professionalism in regards to the leadership approaches appropriate in the military, reviewing the role of transactional and transformational leadership as well as the nature of the military to require an adaptation according to the circumstances (Burns, 1978; Hunt & Phillips, 1991; Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020; Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003). This was scrutinized before reviewing the final component of power (Pfeffer, 1992, p. 35; Cairns, 2017, French & Raven, 1959) in relation to leadership. While the practical implications were slightly absent in the existing literature, the review has put forward various approaches relevant to discover in detail throughout the further analysis of our empirical findings.

## 3 Methodology

*In the following chapter, we aim to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the basic assumptions molding our approach to address the research question. Firstly, we begin by outlining the philosophical grounding with a focus on the interpretive perspective as the guiding direction of our study. Following this, we describe our research approach, including a brief introduction to the research context of TDD as well as the officers' handbook The Management Foundation. Further, we present our data collection and analysis, followed by a section on reflexivity and limitations of our study. Lastly, we conclude the chapter by discussing the ethical considerations throughout our research process.*

### 3.1 Philosophical grounding

The primary aim of our study is to scrutinize young officers' sensemaking of their professional role in correlation with their friendly relationships developed in their work setting. This posed the following research question:

*How do young officers balance the different roles of a leader and a friend in the Danish Defence?*

To study the relationship and boundaries connected to the spectrum of roles, our research primarily builds on the interpretive tradition of symbolic interactionism. The perspective lays the appropriate groundwork to understand the *lebenswelt*, i.e., the lifeworlds, of the young officers and how the respondents interpret the various roles to be affecting their leadership abilities (Prasad, 2018). Moreover, according to Prasad (2018, p. 20), “*with the help of roles and self-images, individuals make sense of any social situation and articulate for themselves (and others) their own place in it*”. The approach is further useful as the officers are perceived to be explicitly cognizant of their identity and the norms they practice and further construct for their subordinates to be in line with the military principles. By treating knowledge subjectively

(Prasad, 2018), it then allowed us to understand how young officers interpret and produce the distancing measures of authority, hierarchy, and power relations and use these appropriately in their social interactions. The direction will similarly consider the role identities and dynamics offered by the officers and how these may be negotiated and altered in the interaction with subordinates (Prasad, 2018).

However, to allow a greater understanding of the empirical material, we will further find support in the hermeneutical tradition when we approach our secondary data collection of *The Management Foundation* handbook published by TDD (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008) as part of the officers' leadership training materials. As we expect the interviewees to be highly value-laden during the interviews, the assistance of hermeneutics will underpin our role as researchers when we endeavor to enter the *lebenswelt* of the officers (Prasad, 2018). Furthermore, the use of hermeneutics, "a form of textual interpretation", will allow us to go back and forth between the text and its specific context, i.e., the officers' leadership training and the ideal leadership guidelines it presents (Prasad, 2018, p. 36). According to Prasad (2018), this is one of the central concepts of hermeneutics, a process identified as *the hermeneutic circle*. Additionally, the identification of *layers of text* in *The Management Foundation* handbook can reveal in-depth meanings and further, enable us to find the subtexts (Prasad, 2018). While moving between the meaning of the written work in *The Management Foundation* and the context of the respondents, we will generate better conditions to understand the delicate balancing act young officers face as leaders between professionalism and friendship in their subordinate relations.

## 3.2 Research approach

As our study is built on the interpretive tradition in which we intend to understand and learn about young officers' leadership abilities and how they navigate the allied relationships of their profession, the research employed an abductive approach (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The method allowed us to alternate between our presumptions of theoretical perspectives and our understanding of the empirical material to reinterpret both aspects in view of each other (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). By similarly recognizing that we are somewhat biased due to our

prior theoretical as well as practical knowledge, we maintain this to be the ideal approach for our study.

Furthermore, in order to conduct a nuanced study, we made use of qualitative research methods in a single case study of TDD. The case of one organization was selected to reach a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the organizational phenomenon (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Through semi-structured interviews and additional document studies of TDD's leadership principles, it enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the lifeworlds, i.e., the *lebenswelt*, of the interviewees. This is grounded in the recommendations by Kvale (1996) who suggests that the method would unfold the viewpoint of the officers and how they interpret and express the experiences in their world. We reinforced this by using open questions in regards to themes which similarly allowed follow-up questions upon the interviewees' responses. The procedure allowed us to approach the research as travelers and let the narratives of the officers guide our direction of the study (Kvale, 1996). The method of working then led the way to center our study on officers' balancing act between leadership and friendship.

### 3.2.1 Research context - background of the Danish Defence and *The Management Foundation* handbook

In order to understand the context of the research, a brief introduction of the Danish Defence as this study's case organization, as well as the officers' handbook *The Management Foundation*, will be necessary. TDD is an amalgamation of the five command levels constituting the defense of Denmark; the Army Command, the Royal Danish Navy Command, the Air Command, the Special Operations Command, and the Joint Arctic Command (Forsvaret, 2020). Although the organization of TDD was first founded in 1949, the modern Danish military has more than 500 years of experience in which a distinct culture and associated traditions has been long established. Today, TDD has just over 21,000 employees of which approximately 15,000 employees are wearing uniforms on a daily basis (Forsvaret, 2020). TDD is further an active member in the military alliance of NATO and cooperates in the form of conflict prevention, crisis management, and defense of NATO's territory (Forsvaret, 2020). However, the development and financial framework of TDD are organized by political agreements by the

Danish parliament (Forsvaret, 2020). Furthermore, since 2012 as part of the implementation of the parliamentary Defence Settlement, all individuals applying to become TDD officers are required to have a bachelor's degree (Brænder & Holsting, 2020).

When conducting leadership training for its officers, TDD has issued *The Management Foundation (Forsvarets Ledelsesgrundlag)* handbook as part of the materials and remains for the graduated officers to utilize (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008). *The Management Foundation* is published by TDD itself and has 31 legibly and illustrative pages of practical information on leadership principles according to TDD's perspective (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008). The book is centered around three themes concerning the nature of leadership in TDD as well as the management philosophy and ethics encouraged (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008). However, the basic principle seems to be that military leadership is about establishing the right conditions for good and efficient problem-solving. While it is incumbent upon everyone in the organization to act appropriately to promote good leadership, it is the responsibility of the leader to utilize resources, such as employees, in the best possible way (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008).

### 3.3 Data collection

The following section presents how the collection of data was gathered. The study is primarily based on semi-structured interviews for the empirical material. However, document studies were similarly conducted to support the empirical analysis.

#### 3.3.1 Sampling and scene

This study is built upon a sample of officers from TDD. We gained access to the site through the assistance of a private contact working in the organization. Our private contact established correspondence to an employee of TDD's Academy who expressed interest in our study after which we presented a one-pager of the details. The one-pager functioned as a research proposal specifying the resources needed in regards to time and respondents. In order to ensure the quality of our data, we established a number of criteria to gather a relevant pool of interviewees fulfilling the basis. Firstly, we made sure that the interviewees were educated officers from the



Academy with an experience of minimum six months in the position after graduating. This was to ensure a certain level of familiarity with their position as superior to subordinates. Secondly, we assured that each of the interviewees was under the age of 35 in order to fit our focus group that we characterized as young officers and further had or have had an active role as an officer. Although the age of 35 was estimated rational and feasible by our contact person, it matches the demographic of millennials (Twenge & Campbell, 2012), also characterized as young individuals in the present time. However, our last criteria was rather a wish as we aimed for young officers varying in gender, age, and the branch to reach a nuanced profile of the sample.

The employee of the Academy then facilitated the contact of three volunteering officers from TDD. However, the sampling approach for this study is not consistent with the purposive sample approach solely as snowball sampling is similarly utilized (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). The latter was put to use when officers were referring colleagues of relevance for our study. Thus, we scheduled nine interviews with officers of TDD of which one was later canceled. However, during the first six interviews, we found a clear pattern to the respondents' experiences and perceived this to mirror theoretical saturation (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In order to make sure that this was indeed a representative sample, we scheduled two more interviews to underpin our early assumptions of theoretical saturation. Therefore, the sum of the sample size for our study is counting eight interviews with officers of different branches in TDD.

### 3.3.2 Profile of the interviewees

We will now broadly describe the frame of the respondents appearing throughout the analysis in the following chapter to allow a greater understanding of the empirical findings. However, the outline of interviewees will be kept at a general level to ensure that sensitive information will remain privileged and private. Central for the eight individuals is that they are ranked as commissioned officers and are aged between 23 and 32. The specific positions are counting titles such as technical officer, deck officer, linguistic officer, tactical officer, and engineering officer in the navy as well as regiments of the army. The positions and departments vary, yet each of the officers has work experience in their role between one and seven years. Although some of the respondents will appear more frequently than others, we will respect confidentiality by providing

each of the interviewees with pseudonyms. These fictional names will be the officers' sole referrals and thus not include characteristics that can be used to identify the individuals appearing. A list of the participants, including their given pseudonym, age scale, and the length of their superior experience in the military inside a range has been attached as appendix A.

### 3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

For the qualitative nature of our study, we selected semi-structured interviews to allow an open direction for the analysis of the officers' leadership efforts and their interpretations of TDD. The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to unravel the interviewees' *lifeworlds* and, thus, detect meanings by interpreting the interviewees' responses (Kvale, 1996). To begin with, we prepared a guide for the interview in line with the themes of our presumptions and arranged a pilot interview with one officer exclusive of the sample size. Although the guide was slightly altered after our pilot interview, the questions were flexible for the respondents to amend. The guide covered questions about the respondents' experiences in their role as officers as well as questions regarding the relationship to members of their unit. For example, we began by asking them to describe their workday in as much detail as possible. This often guided the further conversation as we then asked for particular situations and details of activities they mentioned. In line with our guide, we were similarly able to gain elaborated responses about reactions and behavior in the relation with subordinates. The aim was to learn about the social process of interaction and reinterpretation and how this affected their leadership efforts. The interview guide can be found in the attachments as appendix B.

The interviews went on for approximately 45 minutes to a maximum of 80 minutes in which the length was determined by the answers of the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in English, however, as each of the respondents' native language is Danish, we encouraged them to explain terms or expressions in their mother tongue if they found it difficult to translate or express it otherwise. The measures were motivated in an endeavor to establish trust during the interviews which were further reinforced by the pseudonyms each of the officers received in order to honor their anonymity. We similarly offered a list of guiding questions for the respondents prior to the interview in which both of the researchers participated. All of the eight

interviews were conducted over Zoom due to the situation of the covid-19 pandemic, and the interviews were further recorded in order to transcribe and organize the dialogue. Thus, with this broad approach, we were able to contribute to the understanding of young leaders' abilities aiming to offer new insights into the field of leadership.

### 3.3.4 Document study

In order to enhance the quality of our study, we supported our empirical findings with *The Management Foundation* published by TDD (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008). The handbook, functioning as a somewhat bible for young officers, describes the leadership principles of the organization and is further part of the course material for the education at the Academy. Guided by our research question of *how young officers balance the roles of a leader and a friend*, we utilized the handbook to unravel meanings in the empirical material and similarly guide the direction for the interviews as we discovered relevant insights in the book (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, the use of document analysis, as a “*systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents*”, provided us with insightful additions to the interview data (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Being considerate of the reflexivity and caution towards document studies, as recommended by Bowen (2009), we first determined the purpose of the handbook (leadership principles to guide leadership training) and the intended users (officers) before conducting our analysis. Thus, we established *The Management Foundation* handbook and its analysis to be relevant to answer our research question (Bowen, 2009). In our interview questions we chose not to refer to the handbook, and only asked follow-up questions if the respondents referred to the handbook themselves. This was decided, again, to allow the respondents' descriptions to take the central stage (Kvale, 1996) and avoid unnecessary steering of the conversations to match our pre-assumptions or expectations for the interview outcomes.

## 3.4 Analyzing the data

The process of analyzing our empirical material was embarked on by transcribing each of the recordings from the interviews while reading through the document of *The Management Foundation*. Furthermore, with the theoretical support of the literature review in mind, we

proceeded the data analysis by sorting and categorizing a large amount of material to identify relevant themes for our study (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Although the process was already initiated during the interviews to be considerate of the time constraints, we specifically used the method of Gubrium & Holstein (1997) to alternate between *whats* and *hows* to gain a deeper understanding of the content. While momentarily placing the *hows* inside brackets, we mostly used the statements to present *what* was being said (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

Subsequently, we switched the focus and reviewed the recordings to search for *how* the officers spoke about their experiences in regards to their body language, phrasings, and specific choice of words (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We further analyzed the material individually to look for patterns and later compared and discussed the findings with each other to ultimately develop our argumentation as well as to allow varying perspectives and reflexivity in our analysis (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The interview recordings in the Zoom format also enabled us to return to the *hows* when further detecting the respondents' body language and facial expressions to deepen our analysis on the *whats*.

The described approach allowed us to assess the empirical material in a structured process and not just present the data but substantiate our theoretical claims to emphasize how young officers balance between leadership and friendship (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). However, the method did not only provide us with an overview of the material, it further allowed us to identify the main themes in those of relevance (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). In our individual analysis, we identified emergent themes from the data and after, compared these to agree on the main themes. We identified the following themes in which the central findings worked as a guide for the arguing of our analysis:

- Close relations, friendliness, and friendships between superior and subordinate
- The importance of distance and hierarchy
- The officers' challenge to exercise power while maintaining close relations to subordinates
- Implications of being a young and rather inexperienced leader

By further making use of excerpt-commentary units, a model by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), we will critically interpret the data to analyze the broader theoretical concepts they may suggest (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This model is based on building the analysis around the chosen quote by first setting the stage and making an analytical point, followed by orientation towards the quote, which is then presented, and finally, the argumentation ends with a developed analytical point (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). This way, the quotes are given the “*center stage*” and thus, constructing a story as we proceed in our analysis (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 54). Moreover, by presenting our empirical findings with the excerpt-commentary units, we are able to demonstrate the phenomena for the reader while presenting our interpretation of the specific quote in question (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

### 3.4.1 Document analysis

Accompanied by the hermeneutics, we proceeded the same manner with the document studies. This process of analyzing *The Management Foundation* handbook (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008) included first skimming through the text, followed by a more particular reading of the chapters, and finally, interpretation of the text (Bowen, 2009). Again, after individual analysis of the handbook, we compared our thoughts by discussing together and agreed on the most relevant and emergent ones. Further, we compared the document study findings to our interview data in order to add layers of context and to confirm the findings made from the interviews (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, the document analysis contributed to our understanding by further developing the interview data (Merriam, 1998) while also functioning as a background to compare and contrast the statements. In order to do so, we utilized document studies after conducting and transcribing most of the interviews.

## 3.5 Reflections and limitations

As stated above, our study follows the interpretative tradition. Therefore, we found being reflexive and aware of our study’s limitations to be fundamental in conducting this research. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018), reflective research can be defined as two components: “*careful interpretation and reflection*” (p. 11). With interpretation, they imply the

importance of being aware of previous knowledge, theoretical concepts, language, or other preconceptions one might possess. Reflection instead shifts the focus even more inside the researcher and can be described as “*the interpretation of interpretation*” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 11). This implies that the researcher should acknowledge critically how they interpret the empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). For us, the acknowledgment came through especially in our discussions where we continuously addressed the different pre-assumptions and pre-knowledge we had and challenged each other’s thinking. Here, we found our different nationalities to enable varying perspectives and therefore, support our aim to have an open mind throughout our analysis. Yet, we were also taking into account our similarities in terms of age, gender, and the cultural values embraced in the Western society and the Nordic cultures we both live in. Further, we attempted to maintain objectivity throughout the process and repeatedly question the context of TDD, e.g., by considering the organization to include diverse leadership approaches although it strongly rests on authority. Lastly, we used open questions in our interviews to allow the respondents’ narratives to take the central stage and, thus, limit our own perspectives (Kvale, 1996). By doing so, we placed ourselves in the shoes of reflexive researchers, pursuing the definition of reflexivity by Alvesson, Blom, and Sveningsson (2017) as “*the careful scrutiny and challenging of one’s ideas and lines of action and a capacity to reconsider*” (p. 26).

Moreover, the limitations of our study are important to address. As stated by Prasad (2018), qualitative research should not result in too many oversimplifications. This is also recognized in case studies where “*a central issue of concern is the quality of the theoretical reasoning in which the case study researcher engages*” (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019, p. 66). However, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues some of the criticism towards case studies to be misleading. According to him, one of the common misunderstandings can be stated as “*one cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case, therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development*” (p. 221). By contrast, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that single case studies can provide adequate means to conduct research within social sciences as they have proven necessary when compared to larger samples, yet Flyvbjerg (2006) acknowledges the value in both. Additionally, our selection process to collect interviewees utilizing the snowball effect can limit our research as it may result in a bias selection, given the first contact is the one recommending the other participants (Bell,

Bryman & Harley, 2019). To minimize the risk of being biased, we had brief discussions with the recommended individuals over email or LinkedIn, to confirm that they match our interviewee criteria. Also, as we wanted to engage in diverse perspectives within a limited time frame, we handpicked participants from various backgrounds and, thus, did not book interviews with all recommended individuals.

Furthermore, we recognize limitations in regards to the environment of the interviews. As our study was conducted during the covid-19 pandemic, we did not have the possibility to organize face-to-face interviews and therefore, all eight interviews were held over video calls in Zoom. Thus, it was harder to detect the body language and the smaller nuances that were possibly hindered to some extent due to the format. Yet, as stated before, the recordings of the interviews offered us a unique opportunity to return to the videos and deepen our understanding of *how* the participants spoke, enabling us to pinpoint any missed phrasings or facial expressions. Also, with the Zoom format, the participants were able to choose freely where to take the calls from. Seven out of eight interviewees participated from their own homes or other personal spaces, whereas one respondent took the call from work wearing the military uniform. Both scenarios might have affected the way of speaking during the interviews, as the participants in their homes could have been more comfortable and relaxed, while the participant in the work environment might have been strongly aware of the expectations and requirements of TDD as it was present in the surroundings and, thus, the professional role of an officer might have emphasized the choice of words.

In addition, we realize that the gender distribution in our interviews was not ideal, as only one respondent was female, and seven respondents were men. This limitation was identified from the very beginning as TDD has more men employees and therefore, we have addressed the importance to conduct further research in a more diverse environment as part of our suggestions for future research in the conclusion chapter. Finally, we recognize the limitation of interviewing only officers, not subordinates, although our study is strongly interested in both of these roles while examining the officers' actions in this relationship. However, due to time constraints and the limited extent of this research, we decided to conduct interviews solely with officers to enable deeper analysis and understanding of their roles.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

To conclude, we will end this chapter by presenting the ethical considerations framing our research. For our study's ethical guidelines, we have followed Kvale's (1996) ethical principles throughout the research stages. First of all, we have secured the participants' confidentiality by providing them with anonymity and used pseudonyms instead of their real names (Kvale, 1996). In addition, we had verbal consent from all our interviewees to participate as well as to record the interviews (Kvale, 1996). Also, as recommended by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) we gave the participants as much information as possible before the interviews, to allow them to make a considered and informed decision. This included an introduction of ourselves, a description of the purpose of our study as well as the structure of the interview, including a possibility to address any questions or concerns before the interview. To further establish trust during the interview discussions, we promised to delete the recordings once finishing our research and to send the finalized paper for the participants to read afterwards (Kvale, 1996). Furthermore, any revealing information that might have compromised the respondent's true identity was removed and thus disregarded (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).



## 4 Empirical findings

*This chapter will present our empirical findings and analysis according to two emergent themes. The first main theme discusses the importance of friendliness and maintaining close relations for the military units to function effectively. This is divided into three sub-themes, where we begin by showcasing the formal as well as natural activities stimulating the closeness. The next sub-theme demonstrates the boundaries that officers put in place to maintain professionalism, while the third sub-theme introduces three levels in which closeness emerges. Following this, we move on to the second main theme focusing on the officers' challenge to exercise power while maintaining close relations. Again, this theme is divided into sub-themes. We begin by establishing the formal power assisting officers in their work, before moving on to the last sub-theme presenting the consequences and labels associated with their role as an officer. To conclude, this chapter ends with a summary of the central findings for both main themes.*

### 4.1 The importance of friendliness and maintaining close relations

The first theme discusses how young officers perceive the accounts of identifying themselves between two roles at work: the roles of a leader (the professional persona) and a friend (the intimate persona). Furthermore, this section draws upon the close working conditions in military units to discover how friendliness emerges and is acknowledged by the officers to enhance performance. This theme is further divided into three sub-themes covering 'Seeing your colleagues on 'every single position on the how are you feeling scale', implying the close working relations as means to work effectively in military units and secondly, 'One beer policy' - and other ways of creating boundaries' as the officers need to distance themselves from too intimate relationships in a professional and authoritarian environment. Lastly, the third sub-theme of 'We are like-minded but not equal' - the importance of rank in forming friendships' inspects how individuals' rank either enables forming or evading friendships.

#### 4.1.1 Seeing your colleagues on ‘every single position of the how are you feeling scale’

The most immediate finding that emerged throughout the interviews was the nature of close bonds between individuals. As we discovered, good relationships and knowing the soldier next to you builds the necessary means for military units to function well under extreme and often stressful situations. This is explained by William:

*“It might seem friendly, but I would argue that it's actually professional, because it's just so important for us to be able to function together... 'I know this about you, I know that I can depend on you'.” - William*

The ability to rely on others becomes key in building trust, a value prized by all of the respondents as this example from Emil portraits: *“Trust and respect are definitely the big tools in the military”*. The meaning of trust accentuates, as Emil and the others speak more calmly when describing the importance, also visible from their rather serious facial expressions. Accordingly, the elements of trust and respect enable high performance in quickly changing situations where tasks are executed with the highest possible efficiency, leaving no time for hesitating or second-guessing the reliability of others. William elaborates by describing the closeness to develop over the long periods of time spent together:

*“I feel closer to them [his colleagues] in many ways than I do with my own family because I know them so well. I have seen them literally ... on every single position on the ‘How are you feeling scale’ from feeling absolutely shattered and miserable, either physically or mentally, to euphoric about something.” - William*

Hence, the circumstances have a strong impact on the foundation of friendships that can be detected as part of some of the professional relationships in TDD. By referring to his colleagues as *“closer than his own family”* he reveals the intimate strength of these relations. This is further supported by Oliver, who contrasts the working relations to other workplaces, outside the military environment:

*“What characterizes the Danish armed forces is that we are very close with the soldiers here. It is not always possible to see. So, for instance, after work on the base, we would play ball with them [subordinates] or exercise with them or just have a beer or something. So, it's not much different from any other civilian workplace. Or it's actually closer. I think, in my opinion, you tend to forget after service... that they are your subordinates, and I'm the boss and the title once you're off duty.” - Oliver*

However, the last sentence in Oliver’s reply of tending to forget the superior role signifies the struggle of becoming perhaps too close with some individuals, adding complexity to the authoritarian and asymmetrical relationship between the officers and subordinates. This can be observed in his endeavor to switch roles rather radically when necessary:

*“You develop a relationship that is more cordial and then sometimes you just have to strike down another way and sort of make a shift of tone. That can seem ... fake or disingenuous when you do it. But you know, that's your role. And you have the responsibility to make sure that the task at hand is completed.” - Oliver*

The need to “*strike down*”, denotes the officers’ efforts to actively push themselves away from the friend’s role to enable commanding with authority. The same shift in tone came through with all respondents, as Emil explained it to be an essential aspect of the leadership training: “*You get taught that you have to have a strict line*”, especially crystallized in conducting exercises and war-like scenarios. However, all the respondents also found TDD’s leadership training to include and embrace the benefits of keeping friendly relations to colleagues as well as to subordinates, yet not at any cost. All participants considered the nature of military work and officers’ responsibilities to be based on accomplishing the task at hand, where ultimately the clearly defined roles and strictly professional boundaries must exist to deliver results. The centrality of task is also clearly defined in TDD’s *The Management Foundation* handbook (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008), which recognizes the importance of superiors’ knowledge of their subordinates, and was specifically mentioned by two of the participants:

*“In terms of management, the task is central. However, the best task solution is only achieved if the manager is aware of the competencies of his employees and, as far as possible, applies these to qualify decisions.” (Translated from Danish. The Management Foundation, p. 5)*

TDD’s handbook thus centralizes the focus to be on the task only, where subordinates are important in terms of their skills and knowledge in accomplishing the mission. On the other hand, some aspects of friendliness are actively encouraged by the military organization especially between colleagues. This includes formal activities to embrace the social well-being, networking, and private relations of young leaders, as Karl opened the concept of young officers’ club:

*“We have a young officers’ club ... once alcohol gets involved, it gets very loose ... When I came to the regimen at first, that was really my way of learning the other officers and creating a network... So I try to pull in the new officers who come to the regiment and be a part of this because ... it's what makes serving at our regiment very special.” - Karl*

He continued to emphasize the importance of good relationships between officers and their subordinates and smiled jovially when using a Danish expression to elaborate:

*“We have a saying that “dem der fester godt, kæmper godt” (those who party well, fight well), and that's what we try to put into the everyday [work]... if the private relations aren't in place between the commanders within the units, and also the privates, it's harder to work together.” - Karl*

This signals again the benefit of knowing your colleagues well to perform coherently as a unit. In addition, the idiom of contrasting partying together to fighting together can be seen in connection with the young age of officers. Thus, this marks an interesting point towards young officers’ increased desire for social cohesion and feeling of belonging. In a closely functioning military unit, it can be highly beneficial if members of the unit enjoy and find meaning in their social

affairs. Moreover, this intended construction of social ties indicates that even the authoritarian environment can utilize the more egalitarian relationships in its line of command.

Therefore, in essence, the two roles of a leader and friend require skillful balancing to benefit the most, at an individual level as well as on the organizational level of TDD. This example from Karl presents some of the negative outcomes that too friendly relationships between officers and their subordinates may result in:

*“We had a platoon commander once who became very close friends with... the very young privates in the platoon...It actually ended up going a bit wrong, because the social dynamics of the platoon were weird. And the commander lost authority and respect from some of the guys.” - Karl*

This quote emphasizes that the military function is still very much based on asymmetrical and hierarchical relations, thus, the line of losing respect and authority can be rather easily crossed if officers are unable to bounce back to their leadership roles. Another dimension of possible negative outcomes can be seen as presumed favoritism of other subordinates by the officer:

*“I have experienced that sometimes some of my own sergeants would be less intimidated by coming and saying that something was not in order to me about some of the other sergeants, and that could sometimes be noticed by some of the others, because why would they go to the commander and say that kind of stuff? But that's because we have a history of being friends. So, it can become a disadvantage sometimes.” - Karl*

Consequently, our findings suggest that the more experienced officers with their longer practical superior experience had better-adapted ways to balance these two roles as they seem to be more relaxed when explaining the delicate balancing act. The more relaxed approaches come through especially in their playful and even humorous way to use expressions, such as the example of describing the importance of close relations as *“party well, fight well”*. In comparison, some of the newer officers, with less than two years of leadership experience in the military, occasionally applied a stricter approach, as the next sub-theme amplifies.

#### 4.1.2 ‘One beer-policy’ - and other ways of creating boundaries

As described above, the nature of the close working environment and its effect on the leader's role becomes obvious during the interviews. Furthermore, as expressed by each of the respondents, it can sometimes be difficult to maintain a strictly professional role as an officer and distance oneself from private relations to subordinates. This becomes particularly explicit in one of the respondents, Emil's way of establishing clearly defined boundaries in his subordinate relationships:

*“They are my subordinates first and foremost. I do talk private stuff with them on a regular basis, like how was your weekend or where are you going for your next vacation or whatever. But there is a strict line I call ‘one beer-policy’ so I can drink one beer and then I have to leave.” - Emil*

This strict line phrased as “*one beer-policy*” between the two roles may reflect some of the challenges or uncertainties a new and rather inexperienced leader can face in an environment where respect is strongly connected to the practical knowledge, as indicated by most of the respondents, is only possible to achieve through several years of experience. Thus, it can be worthy to distinguish between the roles of a leader and a friend, when the leader persona is not fully established as part of your work identity. In addition, the severity of the officers' responsibility affects the creation of these strict lines as it enables giving commands and possibly risking the lives of members in their unit. Moreover, these boundaries provide protection for the ‘real’ selves of officers. This is expressed by Emil as he states, “*I do not trust myself to send my friends to their death*”. However, his efforts to separate the two roles of a friend and a leader in total breaks down in some ways as he continues to describe his approach:

*“If you are the strict leader you will never get their respect. You have to pay an interest in their social life. You have to socialize with your subordinates, colleagues, and leaders but it is important to remember the one beer-policy.” - Emil*

This dimension of still “*having to socialize*” highlights the struggle of this balancing act between friendliness and leadership, as he recognizes the value in approaching subordinates and

colleagues as well as his own superiors with more private matters to gain respect. Interestingly, it appears that respect, in addition to practical knowledge and experience, emerges from the genuine interest in others which can be perceived as authentic by showing your human, private, and possibly emotional side within appropriate measures. In general, the shared experiences and revealing some personal aspects reciprocally seemed to strengthen the subordinates' commitment in executing commands. An illustration from Alfred explains this as he elaborates what the opposite of not connecting with subordinates could cause:

*“One of my [officer] colleagues ... had absolutely no feeling with no one on the board. So, you have an [officer] doing one thing and the entire crew going a different way and saying ‘yeah, he can wish whatever he wants to but he will not get anything’ because there’s absolutely no connection between them.” - Alfred*

The benefit of connecting with subordinates is also recognized by Anton who enjoys the respect of his subordinates while having fun and joking with them, hence contrasting the rather strict ‘one beer-policy’ of Emil:

*“They still respected me, but I was still kind of a good friend ... Maybe also sometimes a bit too much. Maybe I cracked some jokes at some bad times. But I’ll rather do that than just be a complete asshole.” - Anton*

Hence, there seems to be another dimension of what being a new, rather inexperienced leader might inflict: enjoying the feeling of being liked even if occasionally risking losing one’s authority. Again, this indicates some interesting directions towards officers as young individuals and raises the question if the feeling of being liked is embraced generally in this group.

Furthermore, the personal differences appear to have a strong impact on how officers perceive and value their subordinate relationships. In addition, we detected some differences between the officers' need to embrace strongly strict lines, to depend on their division, rank, and length of their leadership experience in the military. Distinctly, officers with experience from the higher risk deployments or missions alongside less than two years of leadership experience in the military, embraced a stricter approach, highlighting the importance of professional relations.

#### 4.1.3 'We are like-minded but not equal' - the importance of rank in forming friendships

The closeness between colleagues, superiors, and subordinates is something that nearly all of our respondents highlighted as a rather new phenomenon in TDD. Accordingly, this was not visible ten or even five years ago as expressed by Karl: *“During the last five or ten years, the gap between officers and privates has shrunk.”* This is supported by Emil as he compares the difference to have taken place over an even longer period of time: *“We have a lot of conversations that would have not taken place 30 years ago.”* When asked what has caused the change, Karl elaborates:

*“The thing that has changed is the way that the academies will train the future leaders look at leadership has changed a lot. So, ten years ago, and before that, the leadership books we were given were very much focused on the one way to do it. Throughout the years, the training of leaders in the Academy has changed. And the personalities who have been taken into officers academies are different persons than the old school. So, I think it's a lot to do with just the change in everything else ... the same development that has been going on in the army, it's been modernized, along with the rest of the society.”* - Karl

Yet, it was evident that friendships today are still dependent on the individuals rank, as this example by Anton illustrates:

*“I've never actually gone out drinking any beers with them [subordinates]. I always say 'yeah, maybe next time', so it's not like I'm friends with them at all on my side. Sergeants I was definitely friends with because they were my colleagues, even though I was the leader... And so, they were way more my friends than my colleagues, even though I still had to tell them when they did something good and bad. But in a way that made sense. While with the privates it was way more professional.”* - Anton

He continues by telling us an expression thought to him by his own superior:



*“He [his own superior] said that everyone is equal, like ‘de er ligesindet, men de er ikke ligestillet’ (they are like-minded but not equal). Which is that everyone in value is equal. But in rank, we're not equal. So, if you keep that mindset, I think that's really great.” - Anton*

Thus, even though the respondents recognize that friendliness in general and openness to approach superiors have increased over the years, mimicking the societal and leadership changes, more intimate relationships in the forms of friendships thrive only between the appropriate ranks. The respondents embraced friendliness with all interactions in the same units, yet in total we were able to generalize the respondents' positions and identify three levels of friendliness according to the ranks: (1) friendliness with everyone, (2) friendships between same or close level colleagues and (3) friendly and approachable relations between subordinates and superiors. Being able to recognize these levels as boundaries not to be crossed, the officers can find support when struggling to balance between the roles of a leader and a friend and depending on the situation, e.g., during exercises or free time spent after work in base on deployments, the officers can choose the correct level to function within. However, as the previous sections above indicated, in reality, it can be difficult to keep these levels separated from each other. Therefore, these three levels only provide seemingly adequate guidelines for officers to position themselves as leaders. Also, by acknowledging the friendliness to occur throughout all relations and ranks, the officers were able to signal a good example for their own subordinates, functioning as role models themselves, again enabling the officers to enhance unit performance.

## 4.2 The challenge of exercising power while maintaining close relations

The second theme identified in the empirical data is the officers' use of power to influence colleagues around them. Structured in two subthemes, this section will scrutinize how power is exercised and the motivation behind it. The first subtheme “A system backing up your decisions' - when to use formal authority in making subordinates obey' examines power as a medium supported by TDD. The second subtheme “The seagulls' of the Danish Defence - a consequence of exercising power' orbits the style and tensions evolving when power is exercised.

#### 4.2.1 'A system backing up your decisions' - when to use formal authority in making subordinates obey

The officers expressed the wide scope of issues arising in their work where power sometimes functions as a necessary medium to gain distance and control of the situation. This is obviously exercised in various forms of intensity differing from subtle actions or comments to more explicit and lucid measures as will be showcased. However, it was, more or less, highlighted by each of the officers in which Emil offered a cogent and utmost illustration of the authority he possesses. Although he lifted his eyebrows and implied elements of vehemence, he continued his example in a calm voice:

*“As soon as we have a situation where we need something done, I have the right due to military law to hold a gun to their [his subordinates'] heads and tell them they have to do this now or I will shoot.” - Emil*

The severity is highlighted by the military uniform Emil is wearing and the two crossed swords displayed on the background wall. Being the only officer having the interview with us while working further demonstrates a notion that accentuates his authority. As a young and somewhat inexperienced officer, it may then signify pieces of role insecurity in which Emil attempts to conceal this slightly in autocratic symbols.

However, in a similar vein, Oliver emphasizes how threats about punishment serve as a method of coercing unwilling subordinates. With a bulletin board almost covered with combat patches in the background of his home office, Oliver tells in a serious manner about threatening subordinates with fines or prison if he, according to his own judgment, finds subordinates capable of performing the given task:

*“That's a luxury we have in the armed forces that we don't see in the civilian life that, of course, you can be fired, but we have motivation, and we have punishment, and we have quite severe punishment in those cases also. So, we were never afraid that they weren't*

*going to listen because you would always win and have a system backing you up in your decisions.” - Oliver*

The choice of phrasing implies firm confidence in his authority and associated power. This seems further reinforced by a great trust in the military system to provide the possibilities to exercise power in a systematic and organized way. Although *The Management Foundation* (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008) may be perceived as somewhat open for interpretation, the handbook seems to support that the utilization of power may occasionally be necessary:

*“The use of legitimate means of force is a basic precondition for the Armed Forces' operational task solution, which provides opportunities to achieve goals that cannot be achieved by any other means. The use of force, however, presents significant ethical and physical risks.”* (Translated from Danish. *The Management Foundation*, p. 11)

The excerpt implies an acceptance of power as a medium and underpins the great lengths officers may have to go to when engaging in task solving. *“Ethical and physical risks”* further suggest an acknowledgment of the potential harm or discomfort power may cause other individuals. The power aspect then seems like a profound feature of the officers' leadership efforts and, perhaps, every so often prioritized as an effective method in favor of other modes. It was generally recognized by most of the respondents, however, Oliver described it bluntly as *“You have to have a no-bullshit approach ... They [subordinates] always forgive you”*. It was further supported by Anton who emphasized the necessity of executing punishment to maintain respect and authority: *“If you always just threaten and never do anything about it, then it's also not working ...”*. It seems officers are then obliged to regularly utilize power in order to establish their role in the hierarchy and not lose the respect of subordinates. *The Management Foundation* (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008) handbook appears to recognize this too in that it highlights the importance of discipline in subordinates: *“It is similarly a prerequisite that the manager's subordinates carry out the decision with a discipline that ensures that the task is solved for the purpose it is given”* (translated from Danish, *The Management Foundation*, p. 12). Insinuating that the discipline of subordinates is crucial to task solving, it further underpins that officers are then the co-creators of this where power functions as an effective medium to maintain authority.

The significance of respect and hierarchical distance seems further connected to the nature of the work in which the military is heavily differentiated from the civilian market. This is also accentuated by *The Management Foundation* (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008) handbook stressing that management “*often takes place under particularly risky conditions*” (translated from Danish, p. 11) in which a “*good and efficient task solution*” is fundamental (translated from Danish, p. 7). The character of the work is thus not comparable to those of others in which the distance between superior and subordinate seems to work as a requirement to succeed in the job. Power may then be a contributing factor to generate the distance that allows rapid decision-making for the operational tasks affiliated with the environment. This is further reinforced by Oliver explaining that “*You're not looking for the 100% solution, but you're looking for maybe a 70% solution, but done fast*”. It is in common contrast to the civilian market, that time may be parallel with lives, thus leaving inputs and discussions about task solving of less significance. Power thus seems central to generate distance and respect allowing an officer to make a rapid decision and perform accordingly to the task.

The officers’ leadership efforts thus seem highly influenced by power as a medium in which the military system appears to support this formally. Many officers do not necessarily have the authority in their age as many subordinates are slightly older or only a few years younger than their superior. Similarly, privates as subordinates are perhaps also more experienced in their role than many newly educated young officers are. This further suggests that systematic regulation, as well as officers’ authority to punish subordinates, is perhaps a significant and crucial medium to establish one’s role as superior in the hierarchy.

#### 4.2.2 ‘The seagulls’ of the Danish Defence - a consequence of exercising power

Although the earlier subtheme “A system backing up your decisions’ - when to use formal authority in making subordinates obey’ represents more severe illustrations of the power an officer possesses, it was evident in most interviews that the daily power they exercise is more subtle in nature. The officers’ power motivation was often grounded in an orientation toward the task or success of their unit. It was illustrated with great clarity in a situation where Karl realized

his middle manager was incapable of carrying out a larger training activity for the unit. In a calm and collected manner, Karl described his reaction when he realized the poor quality of the training:

*“... there was nothing to do in the moment because it had already been rolled out, so once it had finished, I called the guy to my office and talked about the activity. We talked about the things that weren't as properly planned as I want it to be. And we talked about how he could do it better for the next activity.” - Karl*

Karl's reaction signifies a diplomatic use of his power rather than the more drastic measures illustrated in the earlier subtheme. It was evident in the interview that Karl could have demonstrated his power in front of colleagues *during* the training and, perhaps, threatened with punishment. Although he did this more discreetly in a confidential discussion, *“calling the guy into his office”* suggests an act underpinning Karl's power on the middle manager. This seems further reinforced by another example Karl provided:

*“I tend to go out and see some of the training that the company is conducting ... just to talk to the guys in the platoons and see if the training is carried out the way I intended it to be. Spend as many hours as I can with the soldiers during the training” - Karl*

Although the presence of Karl himself may possibly be perceived by subordinates as if they are being monitored, the statement also implies that Karl has a softer need for a feeling of belongingness. Observing the training may then also function as a method of reducing the perceptual distance between Karl and his subordinates in that he is present and accessible for the members of his unit. Karl reasoned this action by telling that *“the worst thing for an officer is to be stuck behind his desk for hours and hours, because that's not what they're supposed to do”* and, thus, insinuating the importance of a present leader prioritizing a closer relationship with subordinates.

The more careful use of power is supported by William, who provided yet another example of this when he explained a situation in which a colleague was rushing through a meeting with a

foreign officer during his deployment:

*“I just put my hand on his [his colleague’s] shoulder ... and told him in Danish that, you know, maybe we should go a little bit slower about this, and just told him to take it in. I tried to be on my best behavior to influence him [the foreign senior officer] and give the aura of us actually enjoying the tour around the camp that we were given because I know for a fact that this is something super important for a [nationality anonymized] senior officer.” - William*

Placing a hand on the shoulder of a colleague and directing him to “enjoy” the tour is yet another illustration of more subtle use of power. Although it may be unintentional, the act of the hand can be perceived as accentuating William’s authority in which he attempts to be polite and respectful of the foreign senior officer. However, the prudent style simultaneously implies a care for the relationship aiming not to upset or menace his Danish colleague. Similarly, it once more suggests that William’s exercise of power is oriented toward succeeding tactically in the situation and, perhaps, motivated by a greater achievement for the mission of TDD. The task orientation was a recurring theme during the interviews with the officers and functioned as a reminder for the rudiments of military work.

However, this is not to say that the necessity of power as a medium was recognized consistently among subordinates. Anton offered an illustrative metaphor commonly used for higher-ranked commanders: “*We call them the seagulls because they come, then they shit, and then they leave*”. The statement indicates a cynical distancing from power in regards to control used by superiors and may further suggest a misalignment in the perception of the motivation for power. Many of the respondents stressed transparency and the importance of communicating the rationale and objectives of given tasks. However, a clash in this may create tensions between the superior and his or her subordinates causing elements of resistance to the leadership efforts. This is something Ida struggled slightly with when subordinates would approach her for a confidential discussion in her office. After hesitating for a fleeting moment, Ida described her thoughts:

*“I didn’t always know exactly what to do ... I talked to them about it and I tried to come*

*up with solutions or something. But sometimes I also had the feeling that they kind of brought this to me, because they then expected me to not give them work the next day, or to get some other advantage.” - Ida*

Ida further described how rumors around her soft-hearted personality were floating around in the unit which caused the skepticism of her subordinates' intentions. However, it signifies how the omission of distance and an authoritarian role may result in a somewhat disoriented hierarchy placing elements of power in the hands of the subordinates. Ida further described how she “*tried to use more harsh approaches, but sometimes they [her subordinates] reacted very badly to that as well*”. It clearly suggests how Ida was struggling to balance the use of power with her commitment to a softer leadership approach. The, perhaps, insufficient distance to subordinates may have given rise to an inconsistent and muddled approach leading to the exploitation of Ida's leadership efforts. It may further be explained by the inexperience of a young and newly educated officer wrestling to land on her feet while aiming to win the hearts and minds of her subordinates. However, Alfred provided an interesting perspective related to the respect of subordinates. Differentiating between “*pro forma respect and real respect ...*”, Alfred argued that a “*more intimate relationship*” was important for him in order to be task-oriented and achieve real respect from his subordinates. Although it appears to be clashing with Ida's situation, having Alfred's several years of experience in mind, it may then suggest that experience and capability to balance the utilization of power is an important aspect when an officer aims to include a softer side to his or her leadership efforts.

Thus, prioritizing the leverage of power in lieu of the cordial relationship is not always straightforward and simple for the young officers. The need to feel liked is occasionally undermined although still existent. It was particularly evident when Oliver shrug and flashed a smile while explaining:

*“It's not that we have some sort of special commander-aura around us. We're just ordinary people with the same level of emotion and the same need for cordial relations.”*  
*- Oliver*

Again, the statement indicates a need to belong which may sometimes make it troubled for the officers to exercise power. Being perceived as a “*villain*”, as Oliver similarly described it, or as someone cynical lacking empathy and sensitivity is a common consequence of leveraging power. However, as most respondents recognized, it is a necessity in order to maintain authority and gain respect among the subordinates.

The use of subtle power may thus reflect the officers' need for affiliation in which they aim to prioritize the task while not offending anyone. This is a balance that seems particularly difficult for some of the officers as they struggle to obtain the respect of their subordinates. An imbalance in the use of power then leads to a form of cynical and inexplicit resistance among subordinates. Power is thus, yet again, highlighted as an important medium to generate distance and focus on the task at hand.

### 4.3 Summary of empirical findings and analysis

In our empirical analysis, we divided the findings into two central themes following the lens of officers' relational distance. Zooming into the lens, we found that many of the officers were indicating a need for affiliation even if a loss of respect and authority among subordinates could be a consequential risk. Thus, most of the respondents were advocating friendships within the workplace, yet the closer relationships were mostly thriving between appropriate ranks. This led to the derivation of three levels of friendliness: (1) friendliness with everyone, (2) friendships between same or close level colleagues, and (3) friendly and approachable relations between superiors and subordinates. While the levels of friendliness were seemingly difficult for the officers to separate in practice, it was evident throughout the analysis that experience had a dominant influence on the young officers' leadership abilities. Hence, zooming out on the relational lens, officers having more work experience felt often more at ease balancing the two roles of a superior and a friend to their subordinates. As each of the officers recognized the task as being first and foremost in their work, the use of power seemed further to work as a significant factor for the officers in order to be task-oriented. However, power was most evident in the less experienced officers as they often indicated the use of a stricter approach. They often found support in the system in which formal regulation helped officers to maintain authority by



threats of punishment. This is not to say that it was straightforward for the more experienced officers to negate the friendship. Although they were more free and at ease in their approach, subtle moves of power were still a method in that they prioritized the task while not neglecting the friendship. Thus, balancing the roles of leadership and friendship was highly influenced by experience in which power functioned as an essential medium for officers to maintain authority and respect if the balance was faltered.

## 5 Discussion

*The findings of our empirical data resulted in two main insights. Firstly, they indicated the importance of friendly and close relations for the officers to maintain as leaders in order for the military units to perform well and, importantly, as effectively as possible to execute the task. Secondly, the use of friendliness in the officers' subordinate relations as part of their leadership efforts was harder to achieve in practice without losing one's authority or respect and, thus, resulted in means to exercise power to maintain high distance. These findings are in contrast to the existing literature that treated low- and high-distance leadership as distinguished phenomena, and thus miss the nuances of the practical struggles the combination of the leadership approaches might inflict. In our aim to further discuss our research question of how young officers balance leadership and friendship, this chapter will begin by addressing the theoretical concepts and the distance lens displayed in our literature review, presenting the ideal leadership forms between low and high distance to achieve the required balance. Following this, we will move to discuss the reality emergent in our empirical findings, to showcase how blurry the lines between leadership and friendliness are in the everyday work and interactions of officers, and finally, how in practice the officers mediate the boundaries between the two roles by exploiting power.*

### 5.1 Blurring boundaries of leadership practices and friendships - a conflict between the ideal leadership and reality

As presented in the literature review, the leadership theory tends to discuss low- and high-distance leadership as clearly separated from each other. Looking into the literature, we can find a clear image of who a manager is as well as who a leader is, where the roles are determined by the manager's strong focus on the task and the leader's commitment to the higher purpose and engagement of the subordinates (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Similar definitions can be made between the transactional leader, perceived in the literature in similar terms as a manager while transformational leaders are given the title of a *true* leader, convincing followers through

their strong self-confidence and belief in their vision (Bass, 1985b). Given the military environment, the role of command also portrays itself as the ultimate use of power utilized in crises or other extreme situations, where the person in charge has no other choice but to direct his or her subordinates through the obstacle faced with as quickly as possible (Grint, 2005). Yet, perhaps the most clearly, it is the charismatic leader who gets the highest place on the pedestal, looking down to his or her subordinates - a high-distance position achieved through their almost heroic way of using personal and persuasive communication to increase commitment among followers (Yukl, 1993; Bryman, 1993; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Instead, on the opposite side of the spectrum, authors speaking for friendly and cordial relation-oriented leadership discuss the nature of low distance. Again, the role of the superior seems to be clearly defined in this case interacting with subordinates through small, however rich in value, symbolic gestures to plant happiness and, thus, motivating the subordinates to exceed their work tasks and responsibilities. This approach comes through especially in 'buddy' leadership where the leader balances between the four components of cheering, including, being there and safeguarding (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010), all actions embracing low hierarchy, and the low approachability towards the leader.

The way authors in both ends of the distance-lens clearly define the leader's role, without engaging to a large extent in the practical implications and challenges of utilizing these approaches solely, suggests that these definitions should also be rather visible in reality, when examining leadership efforts. Based on this, we ought to be able to recognize *when* and *which* situations TDD officers apply certain leadership approaches and, thus, clearly map the lines within the officers to balance between professionalism and friendships. However, in practice as illustrated in our empirical findings, the separation between low- and high-distance leadership is not so straightforward and emerges as the officers' struggle to balance between the roles. Accordingly, we found much more complex combinations of leadership approaches and a mix of low- and high-distance relations to exist and therefore, argue our findings to demonstrate some of the missing nuances towards the current literature. Throughout our findings, fragments of each of the presented leadership approaches in the literature review were present in the officers' descriptions of their realities, yet only evident as rather disorientated components that constituted according to the given situation.

Significantly, we found the military environment to have a strong influence on determining how the officers interacted and utilized the various combinations of low and high distance towards their subordinate relations. This became evident in our empirical findings, as all of the participants highlighted the seriousness of the officers' responsibilities as part of this highly risky environment, affecting their need to restrict themselves from too close relations and by doing so, protect their authority, respect, and ultimately the mission. Also supported by the literature, the military environment can be stated to generate challenging and dangerous work settings for the individuals, hence creating demanding expectations for the officers to fulfill as their leadership capabilities effects "*the very survival of their subordinates*" (Rozčenkova & Dimdiňš, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the officers' abilities to utilize various roles, adapt to the required conditions, and make the change between the roles quickly becomes key in executing the task (Pennington, Hough & Case, 1943; Wong, Bliese & McGurk, 2003). Given the strong, clearly hierarchical setting TDD represents, the officers would ideally distance themselves from friendships when working and would only utilize closeness and friendly relationships towards their subordinates when seeking the benefits, e.g., increased motivation, loyalty, and higher employee performance, the use of 'buddy' leadership can bring forward (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Moreover, true friendships are difficult to realize, and as stated above, are not desirable due to the dangerous environment and heavy responsibility of the officers.

However, as our findings clearly indicated, friendliness can create a feeling of camaraderie between the officers and subordinates, strengthening the feelings of belonging and team spirit among the unit members and, thus, improve the unit's performance. Interestingly, in contrast to the strict and authoritarian military environment, the conditions to work closely over long periods of time underlaid favorable grounds for friendships to flourish between colleagues and to some extent between followers and leaders. Many of the interviewees' descriptions of their relations between unit members go hand in hand with Song and Olshfski's (2008) definition of a friendship as "*the positive bond between two people ... it involves a voluntary and amiable relationship that includes support for each other's social and emotional goals and a feeling of equality between members*" (p. 150). In addition, the elements of trust, shared interest, and values

were detected as part of these relations, which according to Berman, West, and Richter Jr (2002) can be recognized as key components of friendships.

In essence, the appropriate closeness and low distance between the subordinates and officers are key in creating respect and, interestingly, also authority towards the officers. Our findings demonstrated the close relations to make the officers appear trustworthy if they revealed something personal about themselves to subordinates and simultaneously seemed to have a genuine interest in the subordinates' experiences, both in and outside the work environment. We argue these characteristics to signal emotional intelligence in the officers' leadership skills, even though none of the respondents explicitly expressed the term emotional intelligence themselves. In line with George's (2000) identified benefits of emotional intelligence, such as fostered enthusiasm, confidence, and increased trust towards leadership, our empirical findings illustrated the officers to be aware of these as all of their descriptions highlighted these factors as key reasons to maintain cordial relations. Therefore, the officers' approach to embrace low-distance relations with subordinates, yet within appropriate measures, displays their acknowledgment of how close relations can enhance their efforts to accomplish the mission. However, in contrast to the portrayed image from the literature, these elements emerged in varying actions between the officers and most commonly in subtle tones.

Furthermore, in line with the literature, most of the officers indicated the use of friendliness as part of their leadership by clearly placing themselves in the roles of 'cheering', 'including' and 'being there', yet 'safeguarding' did not strongly emerge through the interviews (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Especially 'cheering' (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010) was evident in some of the officers' actions to joke around and spend time with subordinates after work or in the base during longer deployments as well as in their ways to foster small talk and private discussions outside of work context, hence aiming to make the subordinates feel good. Also, some of the formal social networking events organized by TDD, e.g., the young officers club, enabled the officers to conduct party-host-like behavior in their collegial relations. We claim these social affairs to have a broader effect also in the officers' approach to lead and command their subordinates, as during the socializing events the officers acknowledged the impact of social connections towards commitment and motivation. Moreover, considering the officers' young age, the social aspects of

‘cheering’ (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010) seemed to be crucial for creating the feelings of belongingness and strengthening the emotional bond between colleagues and officer-subordinate relations. Additionally, the officers embraced ‘including’ and ‘being there’ as part of their ‘befriending’ leadership by allowing subordinates to occasionally participate and give feedback (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010) and importantly, highlighted their approachability by focusing on being present for instance in exercises instead of conducting only administrative tasks behind their managerial role. Our empirical findings supported the approachability to be particularly important for the more experienced officers with more than two years of practical leadership experience.

Yet, the officers were clearly aware of the negative effects of being too close with their subordinates. In addition to losing one’s authority or respect, these included favoritism and challenges to make a clear switch between the roles of a leader and a friend (Taylor, Hanlon, & Boyd, 1992; Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Based upon our findings, we argue these downsides to be more challenging for the less experienced officers to face, hence some of the officers with less than two years of leadership experience embraced a particularly strict approach, as the ‘one beer-policy’ example by one of our respondents illustrated. Here, Sveningsson and Blom (2010) provide supportive arguments as they identify one of the challenges for the friendly leadership approach to include the risk of endless need for confirmation for both the leaders and subordinates. In our findings, we saw this signaling again the strictness in some of the rather new officers as they seemed to be aware of the danger the over-emphasis on feedback in the forms of confirmations might entail. Thus, the rather strong boundaries with some officers were created to avoid the forming of friendships in total to protect and allow the required professional leadership role to thrive. The ability to draw and recognize these boundaries in the subordinate relations can be seen as essential for the young officers to master in order to succeed in such a challenging environment.

Instead, the more experienced officers with more than two years of leadership experience illustrated signs of transformational and to some extent charismatic leadership approaches. The fractions visible in our empirical findings came through especially in their apparent ease to gain respect (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017), a balance between the appropriate roles and

knowing when to make the required switch of roles. These actions seemed to motivate the subordinates and based upon the respondents' descriptions, resulted in subordinates looking up to the officers, hence matching the definitions of transformational and charismatic leaders as having special traits (Bass, 1985a; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Similarly, their rhetoric language, and casual yet confident way of speaking, reinforced the image known in the literature as increasing loyalty (Yukl, 1993; Bryman, 1993; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). However, the ideal image of leader within these forms was hard even for the more experienced officers to maintain constantly as also they admitted struggles to occur when being perhaps too friendly with subordinates. The human, compassionate side in all of the officers surfaced through the leadership approaches on various occasions, yet within different levels. Therefore, in reality, we argue again, the near impossibility of practicing solely low- or high-distance leadership as in practice these frameworks appear too simplistic and do not leave enough room for frictions, nor the combinations between different approaches.

Moreover, our empirical findings revealed rank to determine to what extent it is possible for the officers to have a personal relationship while being part of a strong hierarchical setting, evident in superior-subordinate relations as well as between colleagues. We identified these three levels between low- or high-level distance to occur as follows: (1) friendliness with everyone, (2) friendships between same or close level colleagues, and (3) friendly and approachable relations between subordinates and superiors. We claim the acknowledgment of these levels to be important for the officers' leadership skills and particularly for their development as they present a suitable framework for the young and rather inexperienced leaders to balance according to the situation, as it may substantially differ in terms of the required distance. The acknowledgment of the three-level framework allows the officers to engage in low-distance relations as it provides them with security to move within the spectrum, thus supporting the often required switch from the friend's role to utilize authority or discipline (Taylor, Hanlon, & Boyd, 1992; Sveningsson & Blom, 2010), for instance when chatting with subordinates after work in the base during deployments followed by next day's demanding exercise where the officers need to adjust back to their high-distance leader roles and command with authority.

Furthermore, when positioning themselves according to the three levels, the officers were also aware of the friendliness throughout the ranks and, thus, emphasized their own positions as role models in demonstrating how friendliness in all interactions (i.e., with subordinates, colleagues and the officers' own superiors) increases the feelings of commitment and enjoying working together, hence creating a positive causal connection for the subordinates to continuously enhance unit performance through cordial relations (Sveningsson & Blom, 2010). Even if in practice, the officers were occasionally struggling to maintain their roles within these ideal levels, the example portrayed by them can be seen as key in building trust and respect among the subordinates as well as strengthening the officers' image as genuine leaders.

All in all, it can be argued that by utilizing the entire spectrum between low- and high-end distance in a combined effort, the officers were able to position themselves according to the situation, hence balance between the roles of a leader and a friend. We claim that by using various combinations of leadership approaches the officers can identify the required use of power and in that way either distance themselves from the close relations to subordinates or lower their distance by engaging with them on a personal level. Thus, the conclusion that can be drawn from the dissonance between our findings and the literature, is that the interplay between low- and high-distance leadership should be more explored, especially the way it occurs in practice and includes a range of levels and subtle tones.

## 5.2 Various forms of power to navigate between the boundaries of leadership and friendship

While the findings suggested that officers are, more or less, concerned with their friendship with subordinates and the softer aspects of their leadership efforts, the study further demonstrated that balancing the two aspects of friendships and friendly leadership was not always straightforward. Although the friendship was never explicitly prioritized in lieu of the task, we found that the officers were certainly attempting to balance both roles on several occasions. The officers each stressed the appropriate conditions for their leadership to rest on a relative distance to subordinates to such an extent that discipline and respect could flourish. Yet, the exemplary



situations officers each provided, indicated that the friendship and friendly relations were still protected even when the task was faltering. It was particularly clear when the officers applied power, such as calling a subordinate into the office or placing a hand on the shoulder of a colleague to effectuate the given task. We argue that these dominating interactions were an act of protecting the relationship while not neglecting the greater purpose of the task. Thus, the findings confirm that various forms of power appeared to function as a significant method for officers to establish the imperative conditions allowing them to navigate between leadership and friendship.

Based upon our empirical findings, we thus find power to mirror a medium for officers to mediate between the roles of a friend and a friendly leader. It indicates that most of the officers' hierarchical role was respected by their subordinates. This concurs well with previous findings in the literature of French & Raven (1959) arguing that one has to obtain power before it can be utilized. Further studies carried out by Cairns (2017) confirms this aspect as the author proposes power to be relational and therefore hardly embodied in neither individuals, organizations, nor governments. Thus, power only exists so long as it is granted to an individual, directly or indirectly, by the remainder (Cairns, 2017). Hence, our study provides additional support for the possession of power to be achieved through acceptance of the role.

However, we further found that the use of power was clearly a spectrum stretching in intensity from rather drastic measures to more mild interactions. We argue this to share a number of similarities with French and Raven's (1959) study of power in which they stress that there are many bases of power. Nevertheless, the authors (French & Raven, 1959) put five common and important dimensions of power forward. The majority of the respondents were indicating possession of power as a corollary to their hierarchical role as an officer which confirms French and Raven's (1959) identification of legitimate power. In a similar vein, the officers with more than two years of experience were expressing greater confidence in their role in contrast to the slightly inexperienced officers who were demonstrating insecurities as a consequence of lack of intuition. We argue this to correlate satisfactorily with the findings of expert power (French & Raven, 1959), although we add that mastering organizational and procedural knowledge (i.e., tacit knowledge achieved through experience) allowed the officers to navigate between roles more successfully.

This further lends support to the confidence empowering the respondents to honor disciplined and diligent subordinates with a bonus day of personal time or similar ‘carrots’. The officers perceived this to work as a great motivator for subordinates to further continue the hard work and contribute to generate a feeling of unity within the unit. While the findings confirm previous results from French and Raven (1959), we further argue that the use of rewarding power increased the perception of a friendly relationship in the eyes of the recipients and worked as a medium to dwindle the distance between officers and subordinates. Similarly, as proposed by French and Raven (1959), when the officers rewarded subordinates, they found attractiveness and confidence in their leadership to follow. This concurs well with distinctive characteristics of a charismatic leader in which the leader is idolized by the followers and, thus, possesses influence potential solely by his or her characteristics (Bryman, 1993; Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017).

However, the officers also demonstrated how they utilized the formal system of punishment in TDD and threatened subordinates with fines or, ultimately, prison. Although French and Raven (1959) are correct to argue that this orbits a leader's ability to manipulate subordinates, we further find this to mirror an attempt to increase the distance to subordinates. As anticipated, our study proves that the boundary between friendship and friendly leadership was rather personal, however, interpreting the findings with caution, it may suggest a method aiming to retreat from a relationship to subordinates on the borderline to becoming overly friendly. This is substantiated in the respondents expressing great confidence in the continual tolerance and remission of subordinates.

Similarly, there were clear indications that a small number of the respondents were experiencing issues of subordinates not recognizing their authority or exploiting it cynically. This was regardless of rather intense attempts to reclaim respect and discipline among subordinates. However, as the effort was never received well, we argue these situational tensions to reflect the subordinates’ showdown of the officers’ hierarchical position. It supports French and Raven’s (1959) as well as Cairns’ (2017) claim that one has to obtain the various forms of power in order to make use of it. Thus, not succeeding in the reclaim of subordinates’ obedience suggests that

the boundary of friendship and friendly leadership may have been exceeded which a number of the subordinates could detect. The behavior of resisting subordinates further correlates to findings of Berman, West and Richer Jr (2002) identifying the link of favoritism and manipulation to friendships between superiors and subordinates. This further substantiates previous findings in the literature offered by Cairns (2017), who argues that power has to be exercised effectively in order not to create power struggles and conflicts. However, as conflicts and power struggles were indeed evident in the raised situations, we argue that the respect of subordinates was, more or less, impossible to reclaim once the boundaries were overstepped. Although our argument is substantiated by a number of the respondents' experiences of colleagues, the finding should be treated with considerable caution given that our study is based on a limited number of respondents. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that power is rather insignificant when the boundaries between friendship and friendly leadership have been overstepped to such an extent that favoritism is detected among subordinates.

Thus, this section has led us to conclude that power is a medium utilized by officers to navigate between the boundaries of friendship and leadership. Although power was evident in most of the respondents, the various forms employed had ground in contrasting motivations. While the mild and positive forms of power was dwindling the distance, the more coercive forms of power were, directly or indirectly, made use of to increase the distance between officers and their subordinates. Therefore, we argue that officers utilize power to influence the relational distance. Although a number of the respondents were wrestling to find the right balance, these findings may be seen as important when reflecting on power as a medium to balance the roles of a friend and a friendly leader.

### 5.3 Summary of discussion

Throughout the discussion, we have addressed the misalignment between the ideal leadership presented in the literature and the reality, where officers struggle to maintain solely low- or high-distance relationships. Instead, our research revealed the boundaries between the various leadership styles and the levels of friendliness to be blurry, hence displaying the delicate nuances of low and high distance to overlap in practice. Moreover, an even more in-depth examination

was appointed at the officers' means to mediate the boundaries between friendship and friendly leadership by utilizing power. Therefore, our discussion has led us to the conclusion that the literature neglects the practical implications in leadership and presents the theoretical concepts as more separated and straightforward than our findings have showcased.

## 6 Conclusion

*In this final chapter, we summarize the central findings from our empirical material accordingly with our contributions to the literature on leadership in management and organization studies. With our research question, we aimed to understand the abilities making young leaders balance the relational distance to their followers in a military context. The work revealed promising findings that we will present accordingly to the two themes we identified. We then end the chapter by addressing the theoretical contributions of our work along with suggestions for future research, before concluding with practical implications.*

### 6.1 Empirical findings

In this study, we have investigated how young officers balance the boundaries between leadership and friendship. Our first central finding shows that the friendly and close relationships between the officers and subordinates enhance the effectiveness of the military units and, thus, enable better accomplishment of the task. Moreover, we found the close working conditions between unit members over extended periods of time to establish favorable grounds for friendships to occur. However, the officers were also aware of the downsides of being too close with their subordinates and, thus, created boundaries to maintain high distance in order to uphold their professional leadership roles. This was especially evident in the officers with less than two years of practical leadership experience, as they were more dependent on the clear lines and the limits of low distance towards their subordinates. Without these boundaries, they would have risked losing authority and respect, i.e., the key components for the subordinates' motivation, loyalty, and commitment towards the mission.

Instead, the more experienced officers, with more than two years of leadership experience, demonstrated confidence and knowledge to move within a broader scope of low and high distance in their subordinate relations. Therefore, they were able to engage on a more personal level with their subordinates as their experience and gained respect provided them with the

security to know when to draw the line. Yet, our findings indicated that the authoritarian environment of TDD restrained the friendships and closeness to emerge within certain levels, as the challenging and dangerous working conditions required continuous awareness and seriousness. We identified the levels to be based upon the individuals' rank and occur accordingly: (1) friendliness with everyone, (2) friendships between same or close level colleagues, and (3) friendly and approachable relations between superiors and subordinates. In reality, it was difficult for the officers to maintain these levels, even when acknowledging them, hence appearing blurry in practice. Yet the acknowledgment of the three-level framework enabled the officers to find support when searching for the correct balance between the roles of a leader and a friend according to the situation. Moreover, by being aware of the first level and its meaning in practicing friendliness with everyone as well as the second level of even further friendliness with colleagues, it highlighted, even more, the officers' positions as role models. By embracing close relations in all interactions, the officers were able to appear trustworthy, acting consistently and transparently, hence strengthening the image of officers as true and genuine leaders. Thus, the correct balancing act between the three levels is indicated again to enhance unit performance.

Our second central finding illustrated the use of power as the officers' means to reduce and increase distance towards their subordinate relations as part of their balancing act between the two roles. Here, we identified more drastic forms of power to support the officers' authority and provide resources in making the subordinates obey commands and, thus, support the officers' leader roles. These forms of power, emergent as threats of punishment, were supported by TDD and separately justified in *The Management Foundation* handbook (Forsvarskommandoen, 2008) as necessary to obtain discipline when prioritizing the task, also reasoned by the military law in case of extreme situations. While power presented itself crucial for the officers to establish their role in the highly hierarchical setting, in practice the officers were more often signaling the use of subtle forms of power, apparent in discussions or physical gestures, e.g., in placing a hand on the subordinate's shoulder. By using the various forms of power, the officers were able to better balance their authoritarian role and further, ensure quick decision-making to accomplish the task under pressure.

Overall, these findings demonstrated the officers' struggle to balance between the roles of a leader and a friend and emphasized the impact of experience in mastering the correct balance, where power provided the means to affect the distance when necessary. Therefore, we claim that we have met the aim of our study in answering our research question by deepening our understanding of the delicate balancing act the officers are required to possess. Moreover, we have shed some light on the practical implications and challenges towards the literature, as outlined in the following section.

## 6.2 Theoretical contributions

Our study has highlighted the importance of personal relations for officers and how they simultaneously navigate the asymmetrical relations of being a leader for the selfsame friends. This was showcased to be a delicate and sometimes troublesome balance for the young officers. However, as indicated in the initial chapters of our study, leadership represents a body of the literature in management and organization studies that have been thoroughly researched for many decades (Alvesson, Blom & Sveningsson, 2017). Thus, albeit the great theoretical attention on close as well as the more distanced relationships between a leader and a follower, we find it puzzling that the practical implications and struggles have been neglected slightly in the field.

Similarly, we gained considerable insights with regard to the leadership efforts practiced by the officers. We were able to identify several leadership approaches harmonizing with the distinct styles presented in the literature review, such as the charismatic traits as well as the 'buddy' attitude. However, at best, this was simply fragments of the well-defined figures as the officers regularly switched between approaches of high- and low-distance leadership. Therefore, we argue that researchers portray the various forms of leadership as rather straightforward. We believe this is too simplistic to cover the combinations evident in practice and, thus, we emphasize the nuances to be added as a new way to engage in the field.

Furthermore, we found that power provides a powerful tool for leaders to mediate the boundaries between the various roles in their workplace setting. Our study demonstrated that power was put in function to control the relational distance to followers and, dependent on the expression of

power, officers were able to reduce or increase the closeness. This provides a promising foundation to expand on the potential for power and encompass pragmatic aspects in the literature.

Lastly, the outset of our thesis described the new opportunities and challenges that young individuals put forward in organizations (Anderson et al., 2016). Yet, this aspect is forsaken and represents a gap in the existing literature on leadership. Our findings on young leaders and how they navigate the role as superior to peers and older subordinates thus add to a growing body of literature on young leaders. Taken together, considerable progress has been made within the field of leadership in which our study provides an agenda for a new way to approach future research.

### 6.3 Suggestions for future research

Based upon the complexity of our findings and the limitations we encountered, we suggest future research to be needed in order to verify the issues we raised. We have identified a trend in leadership theory that suggests friendship with subordinates is a key element of leadership. In theory, this often sounds like an easy thing to achieve. However, we found that it was a complex task in practice and, thus, we propose further work to develop and expand on the nuances put forward. As we believe our findings are promising, we hope future investigations will focus more on the practical implications of utilizing a combination of approaches rather than narrowing on distinct leadership styles. Therefore, we hope our research will serve as a base for future leadership studies embracing the social complexities of a human being.

Furthermore, we recommend additional work to examine the aspect of young and rather inexperienced leaders in the context of leadership distances. Although we found the experience to be significant on young leaders' abilities, we notice the absence of the phenomenon in the existing literature on leadership. Thus, we believe this study has given rise to further work addressing the aspect of experience in future leadership studies. Additionally, given the narrow sampling of our research and the gender distribution being heavily in favor of men, as seven men and one female were interviewed for this study, we hope that future research will explore the practical complexities in a more diverse and equal context.



## 6.4 Practical implications

Before concluding this chapter, we would like to promote the practical implications of our study. As our empirical findings indicated, the challenge to balance between leadership and friendship was especially evident for the less experienced officers. Although acknowledged and to some extent included as part of the officers' leadership training in TDD, we see the benefit of further heightening the impact of this as part of the officers' managerial work. By strengthening the knowledge on the practical combinations of various leadership approaches, instead of examining leadership through a rather one-dimensional focus on either low or high distance, the young and inexperienced officers would quickly learn to adapt and utilize the nuances as part of their daily interactions with subordinates. Thus, in a bigger picture, we propose that practitioners pay more attention on how to make learning mechanisms for especially young leaders and consider how to support the transfer of practical knowledge from the more experienced colleagues. After all, it is the young leaders who will continue to develop the leadership practices from the leadership theories, as we know them today.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A - List of interviewees

Pseudonym	Scale of age	Length of superior position in the TDD
William	23-26	1-3 years
Emil	27-32	1-3 years
Karl	27-32	4-7 years
Anton	23-26	1-3 years
Oliver	23-26	1-3 years
Ida	27-32	1-3 years
Alfred	27-32	1-3 years
Mads	27-32	4-7 years

## Appendix B - Interview guide

### **Background and training to become an officer**

- a) Can you tell us about your background? Education, etc.
- b) Can you describe in as much detail as possible what it took for you to become an officer?  
Training, exercises, courses, etc.
- c) Can you describe moments and feelings during your officer-education where you felt particularly suitable or fit for the role (as officer)?
- d) Can you describe moments or feelings during your officer-education where you felt like quitting or not belonging in the role (as officer)?

### **Role of an officer**

- a) Can you tell in as much detail as possible what you do as an officer? What does your typical workday look like? Your everyday experiences in your current role as officer and what you expect to be doing in the coming months.
- b) Can you tell us about your relationship with your subordinates/unit?
- c) Do you recall a moment where you found it challenging to maintain your role as officer/superior while being a good friend for your subordinates/unit?
- d) Can you describe in as much detail as possible a situation where you gave an order to one or more of your subordinates from your unit? A significant situation that you remember, the latest interaction, or whatever comes to your mind.
- e) Do you remember a training exercise in which your subordinates appeared to be frustrated/tired/resisting/unwilling in any way?
- f) Do you remember a situation/training where you and your unit had an unexpected issue or conflict?
- g) Can you tell us about a situation (including subordinates) that you are particularly proud of?

### **Cooperation with your colleagues/subordinates/unit**

- a) Can you describe your colleague commanders?
- b) Can you tell us about a superior that you admire/find impressive?

- c) Can you tell in as much detail as possible how you use feedback in the armed forces?
- d) Have you ever had a conflict with a subordinate/superior?
- e) Have you ever had a subordinate who reached out to you for help with a private matter?

**Future plans**

- a) Can you tell us about your future plans?