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# A Study of the Role of Education in the Relation Between Managers and Subordinates

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of education in the relation between managers and subordinates, as well as the impact of education on the leadership style of managers. Also, the role of education in the relation between subordinates was also examined as a secondary priority. A qualitative approach was used, in which representatives from four organizations were interviewed. In all of the organizations, a manager was interviewed. In addition to this, between one and three subordinates were interviewed in each organization. The organizations featured were a primary school, an upper secondary school, a bank office and a congregation of an independent church. All of the organizations were physically based in the Gothenburg region. The results were then compared to each other and previous research in the fields of management and social psychology, primarily regarding leadership, education and social identity theory. It was found that education seemed to affect social status within professional groups in the workplace, as well as in itself being a component in the formation of such professional groups and their identities. Education seemed to mostly affect the leadership of the interviewed managers through an increase in self-esteem and confidence related to their practicing of their professions, though it only did so on a small scale. This view was also held by subordinates, both in regards to the leadership of their managers, as well as their own professional lives.

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## **Introduction**

The subject of leader-subordinate relations is an established field of research within management (see for example Indik, Georgopoulos and Seashore, 1961). However, there seems to be little research directly related to the subject of how education affects manager-subordinate relations. As a consequence of this, it could be necessary to take a wider perspective of the topic at hand, analysing its various components separately rather than as an already existent whole, and finally putting the pieces together to form a representative picture of the various forms of research and associated conclusions of relevance for studying this.

Fields of research other than that of management are also relevant to form a proper understanding of the topic. Most notable among these is that of social psychology. Understanding the role of education in the relation between managers and subordinates requires a proper understanding of how education can affect interpersonal relationships.

Also, an understanding of how education affects the performance of managers requires proper examination and evaluation of previous research related to the actual effects of education and its implications on the actions of managers.

## **Problem definition**

Education is generally considered to be something useful, helping people achieve more and become more productive in their professional lives. People with a higher degree of education are generally ascribed a high social status (see for example Jackman and Jackman, 1973), further reflecting the idea that education is something positive, helping the individual contribute more towards society. In line with this reasoning, one would expect education to have a positive effect on leadership, helping managers perform better as leaders.

On the other hand, research in the field of social psychology has shown that people tend to favourise those similar to themselves, particularly members of the same groups as themselves. An example of such a group would be people with a similar form or level of education, as proven by research (see for example Stubager, 2009). Thus, one could expect this discriminatory form of behaviour to emerge in situations where interactions between people of differing levels or forms of education take place, which would suggest that a leader with a certain form of education could be poorly suited in a particular education, even if the leader in question has a high degree of education.

As noted above, the general subject of manager-subordinate relations is a relatively established part of management research. It does however seem to lack in certain areas, one of which is the role of education. Given the contradiction of differing perspectives and fields of research presented above, this seeming lack of proper knowledge presents a possible problem both in theory and practice, given its potential impact on manager performance and the effects this can have on entire organizations.

## **Research questions**

- Which role does education play in the relationship between manager and subordinate and, secondarily, among subordinates?
- How is the leadership affected by the manager's education?

## **Purpose**

The aim with this research is to investigate the relationship between the manager-subordinate relation, subordinate-subordinate relation and the education of the manager. The relation in this context is defined as to which extent both parties are satisfied with their manager/subordinate and the degree of trust they feel in each other.

In addition to that, this research is also aiming to examine how the manager's education affects the character and eventually also the success or failure of the leadership. In this context, the term "education" covers both the subject area, the length of the education and also eventually education in terms of any in-service training courses the manager has participated in.

## **Terminology**

### **In-/out-group**

These terms originate from social psychology, notably within the field of social identity theory, with works such as Tajfel (1970) being early examples. In this context, the term *in-group* refers to individuals belonging to the same group as that being studied or otherwise described, whereas *out-group* refers to those not belonging to the said group. This definition conforms with that described by *Psykologilexikon* (1994), which is also how Tajfel (1970) and others use it.

### **Leader**

According to Yukl (2012), there are many different definitions of leadership, which contrast in many ways. Yukl further argues that "*Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption whereby intentional influence is exerted over people to guide, structure and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization.*" (Yukl, 2012, p.18). Assuming that this definition of leadership is credible, one could then define a leader as someone who acts in the role of actually performing said leadership, which is the way the term has been used in this text.

## **Manager**

The role of being a manager usually involves a number of administrative tasks and is more focused around answering questions like “How” and “When”, in contrast to a leader who is answering the questions “What” and “Why” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2010). In this text, the word *manager* is primarily used when referring to the organizational position of a manager.

## **Subordinate**

(21st century dictionary., 1999, p.1406) defines *subordinate* as “*someone or something that is characterized by being lower or secondary in rank, status, importance, etc.*”. The term “subordinate” is in this context defined as the employees working under the manager in terms of organizational hierarchy.

## **Superior**

(21st century dictionary, 1999, p.1418) defines *superior* as “*higher in rank or position*”. In this text, it is used to refer to a person who is higher in rank or position within an organization.



## Literature review

### Introduction

This literature review combines elements from various areas of research considered to be relevant for the purpose. The subject of how education affects the manager-subordinate relation can be broken down into several aspects, as noted previously in this text. Consequently, a range of topics are covered, starting with that of manager-subordinate relations, then moving onto trust and social identity, and finally covering the role of education in modern society, in order to illustrate its perceived importance. The purpose of this is to give an accurate representation of the subject while emphasising its connection to many different scientific areas.

### Previous research within leadership and subordinate relations

Indik, Georgopoulos and Seashore (1961) investigate the relationship between *superior-subordinate relation* and *high level performance*. The research considers the important factor of *communication* in the personal relation between superior and subordinate, as the authors show that there tends to be a positive correlation between the degree of *open communication* between superiors and subordinates and the *performance*. *Open communication* could in this context for example be to which extent a superior discusses and cares about work related problems the subordinate experiences, or to which extent a subordinate can influence the superior with her or his ideas (Indik, Georgopoulos and Seashore 1961). The authors also present indications that the degree of subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors' *supportive behaviour* has a positive influence on the organizational *high level performance* as a whole, as the research proves that there tends to be a correlation between these specific two factors, even though the size of these correlations is not large.

The same research paper also states that the organizational performance on a group level tends to be higher if there is a high degree of autonomy and local influences on work-related matters for subordinates and also their superiors (Indik, Georgopoulos and Seashore 1961).

Even a high degree of mutual understanding of each other's viewpoints and problems among people working and collaborating together has a positive influence on the organizational performance on a group level (Indik, Georgopoulos and Seashore 1961).

How well the collaboration between subordinates and leaders works out is perhaps often influenced by personality congruence (Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2008). According to Zaman Bin Ahmad's (2008) research, there is a highly significant correlation between leader-subordinate congruence and the degree of satisfaction with the supervision, which indicates that the more similar personality the supervisor and the subordinate have, the more satisfied the subordinate will be with the supervisor in general. Another finding from the research made by Zaman Bin Ahmad (2008) was the fact that there tends to be a quite weak but positively correlated relationship between the supervisor-subordinate personality congruence and the subordinates' satisfaction with work itself and a significant relationship between the leader-subordinate congruence and subordinates' job satisfaction as a whole - the more similar they are, the more satisfied the subordinate will be with his or her job in general.

Klaussner (2012) discusses the emergence of trust (and mistrust) between leader and follower from a processual perspective. Klaussner argues that trust is not something static and it is more an outcome of social relations and interactions. He argues that trust can always be transformed or changed – developing and increasing trust is a processual phenomenon and it is therefore hard and to measure in terms of digital numbers etcetera.

A couple of factors that determine the degree of trust in a social relationship are the specific relationship's past, the individual's evaluation and assessment of behaviour in the relation and thirdly, also individual expectations about the future (Klaussner, 2012).

Klaussner (2012) points out the individual's expectations as one of the main factors to encourage trust in a specific social relation and discusses the problem regarding how the individual leader and follower can judge or evaluate the exact same behaviour in completely different ways. The leader may assess his or her leadership as fair and good, while the follower on the other hand could judge the leadership as unfair or problematic.

Another main point Klaussner (2012) mentions is the importance of rational and consistent behaviour in the process of establishing trust in a leader-follower relation. However, the leader could sometimes naturally be forced to handle or manage turbulent situations and circumstances, as this is a certain part of the job of being a leader. These specific situations or

circumstances can enforce the leader to make special decisions or changes and in this kind of situations, it is vital for the leader to declare and explain that the changes or decisions are not made randomly or personally indented against the followers themselves, but for the current circumstances. Also sudden environmental changes is a factor that could lead to mistrust, which means that continuity and letting people work on together for a long time is therefore a vital factor in the process of establish in this specific kind of relations (Klaussner 2012).

Moreover, as the process of establishing trust in a leader-follower relation is so complex, it is often hard trying to re-establish trust in a relation when mistrust has arisen and a typical factor in a leader-follower relation leading to mistrust towards leaders is abusive supervision, as it undermines the followers' feeling of responsibility and trust (Klaussner 2012).

In their study, Gillespie and Mann (2004) investigate trust in leader-follower relations as they investigate the relationship between different leadership practices/characteristics and subordinates' trust in their leaders. The study shows that leaders working with an active leadership style are associated with members' trust in them, while a more passive-inspired leadership has the opposite effect – it could lead to mistrust.

The extent to which members or followers share common values with their leaders is also often associated with establishing trust, which is related to two main factors (Gillespie and Mann 2004). Firstly, sharing common values often helps followers predict how the leader will act in the future and guarantee them that the leader will make logical decisions in a specific situation. Secondly, followers and leaders sharing common values and vision could make it easier for the organization as a whole to work towards the organizational objectives (Gillespie and Mann 2004).

Gordon and Gilley (2012) have designed a trust model consisting of components encouraging trust and trust is in this context defined as "*followers' willingness to make themselves vulnerable to the actions of the leader*" (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer, 1998 cited in Gordon and Gilley, 2012, p.28).

Social interaction, genuine interest and physical presence are factors that contribute to the development of trust in the personal relationship between follower and leader. In practical terms, this means for example that a way for a leader to establish trust in the relation with the

employees is to leave his or her office and speak directly with them, asking them about their personal life and showing that he or she cares about the employees (Gordon and Gilley 2012).

To listen, and furthermore also trying to solve employees' work-related issues or problems, is another factor for leaders trying to develop trust. Gordon and Gilley (2012) argue that this shows that the leader not just cares about the employees as employees, but as colleagues.

#### Short summary of this section

In summary, in these first articles, which mainly cover the leader-subordinate relation in general, a couple of characterising main features regarding the general relation between leader and subordinate in work-related context seem to appear, which could be associated or related to the purpose of this study.

Firstly, more or less all of the articles mentioned above indicate the importance of how the specific leader acts, handles different kinds of situations and tries to interact with his or her subordinates. In general, the focus seems to be on the leader more than on the subordinates in the processual development of for example either establishing trust or organizational high-level performance.

The extent to which the leader is capable of, or has the right competence for, for instance communicating well, acting rationally and supportively, encouraging subordinate autonomy and letting him or her influence the work are seemingly relevant factors for encouraging trust in the leader-subordinate relation (Gordon and Gilley, 2012).

## Previous research from social psychology

Tanis and Postmes (2005) consider the distinction between *trustworthiness* and *trusting behaviour* to be important. In this dichotomy, *trustworthiness* refers to a characteristic subjectively judged to be possessed by a certain individual, whereas *trusting behaviour*, according to the authors, “...involves relinquishing control over outcomes valuable to the self.” (Messick and Kramer, 2001 cited in Tanis and Postmes, 2005, p.414). As such, *trusting behaviour* can be said to be a more practical expression of trust, whereas *trustworthiness* in this context is more passive. In their study, the authors found that group membership does not increase perceived *trustworthiness*, whereas cues to personal identity does (Tanis and Postmes, 2005). Group membership was found to be relevant for *expectations of reciprocity and trusting behaviour* only when cues to personal identity are unavailable.

Tajfel, Billig and Bundy (1971) found that *social categorization* led to a behaviour where the members of the *in-group* favoured other members of the same group, discriminating the *out-group*, even when class signifiers were irrelevant to the situation at hand. The authors also found that the aforementioned discriminatory behaviour persisted even in situations where it had a negative impact on the maximum joint profit, whereas the maximum profit for the own group did (Tajfel, Billig and Bundy, 1971). Furthermore, the subjects of the study actively tried to maximise the difference between the in-group and the out-group, even at the expense of their own objective interests, making such maximisation the cause of the clearest effect on the distribution of rewards within the study (Tajfel, Billig and Bundy, 1971). An important part of their findings is that “...they also point to the possibility that discriminatory intergroup behaviour cannot be fully understood if it is considered solely in terms of an ‘objective’ conflict of interests or in terms of deep-seated motives that it may serve.” (Tajfel, Billig and Bundy, 1971, p.176).

Stubager (2009) examines the relation between level of education and political views on a libertarian-authoritarian scale among the Danish population. He argues that this relation exists due in part to the socialisation of such views as part of the group identity of social groups in western society, and that this has replaced the previous left-right type of political class conflicts previously seen in the political sphere of western society (Stubager, 2009).

According to Stubager (2009), suchlike socialisation takes place within educational institutions, where the libertarian-type views forms a part of the social identity of students, an identity which contrasts with the authoritarian views held by the group of people holding a lower education.

In his study, Stubager (2009) finds that the subjects with a higher level of education tend to identify themselves with others of the same level of education at a higher degree than those with a lower level of education, although the behaviour of identifying with others of the same level of education was prominent among all subjects. This, according to the author, is explained by the higher degree of self-esteem associated with having a high level of education, while the opposite holds true for a low level of education.

The study also establishes that the respondents agreed that there is indeed a conflict between different groups in society, and that “...*we may observe that the group consciousness of the low education group is markedly more conflictual than that of the high education group, while strength of group identity is characterised by the opposite pattern.*” (Stubager, 2009, p.224-225)

Burford (2012) argues that medical education could benefit from the application of social identity theory, since the current form supposedly reinforces a form of group behaviour wherein the professional identity of doctors is formed through a form of imitating behaviour, which causes a high degree of heterogeneity within the social group, and causes problems in interactions and communication with other professions, for example when information originating from the same professional group as the individual person gets prioritised higher than that originating from other professional groups.

#### Short summary of this section

The implications of the research presented in this section are in many ways of interest for the purpose at hand. First and foremost, the importance of social categorisation is shown, even in cases where the factor on which the categorisation is based is seemingly trivial (Tajfel, Billig and Bundy, 1971). There are clear indications that education is a significant part of social identity, and as such a considerable attribute on which to base the aforementioned categorisation.

Another important observation is that there is evidence to suggest that those belonging to the same group, or generally exhibiting similar characteristics, seem to display a higher level of trust towards each other compared to the level of trust displayed against “outsiders”. Stubager (2009) established that both the high and low education groups considered a conflict between said groups to be existent in society, while Tajfel, Billig and Bundy (1971) found that discriminatory behaviour occurs without any objective motivation.

Consequently, there seems to be a considerable amount of research suggesting that the role of education in the workplace may be misunderstood and a potential source of conflict. If, as suggested above, relations between education-based groups may be conflictual, then this could possibly also mean that a higher level of differences in education within an organization could cause a correspondingly higher level of conflicts.

### **Educational credentials of managers**

Marteilli and Abels (2010) examined various credentials of chief executive officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies (a list of the 500 largest American companies, ranked by gross revenue), such as age, gender, ethnic background and education. They found that the dominance of white males still persisted, albeit to a smaller extent. More than 93 % of the CEOs held a degree at a bachelor level or higher, 47 % of undergraduate level degrees were in the field of business and the most common form of degree held was a master of science degree, being held by more than 55 % of the CEOs. (Marteilli and Abels, 2010) Another finding worth noting is the fact that 28,3 % of master’s degrees were awarded by the so-called “Ivy League” schools. (Marteilli and Abels, 2010) Generally, the education level of managers was found to have increased since previous studies.

Senge (1990) discusses the concept of a *learning organization*, which he considers to be of significant importance for organizations operating in the highly competitive and constantly changing environment of the modern world, where the author argues that an ever increasing level of insight and understanding is required in order to understand said world. He identifies the ability to constantly make experiments and test new ideas as one of the most prominent and important abilities of suchlike organizations, which both requires and leads to learning (Senge, 1990). This learning, Senge argues, needs to take place at every level within the organization, not just within management.

Senge (1990) further argues that the role of a leader can be seen in many different ways, for example as a designer, teacher or steward.

Bertrand and Schoar (2003, p.1169) state that "*managers with higher performance fixed effects receive higher levels of compensation and are more likely to be found in firms where ownership is more concentrated...*".

The authors also claim that differences in behaviour across managers depend on some different managerial characteristics. For example, managers who hold an MBA degree tend to use or follow more aggressive strategies, while older and more experienced managers in general are more financially conservative (Bertrand and Schoar, 2003). Another finding presented in this paper related to this is that younger managers, and to an extent also those holding MBAs, spend less on R&D.

#### Short summary of this section

The last three articles covered seem to confirm that education is regarded as highly important for a manager. Martelli and Abels (2010) showed that the educational attainments of managers has increased in recent years, implying that there is a trend for increased levels of education among managers. The findings presented by Senge (1990) do not explicitly mention education as a factor, although the topic of learning perhaps can be related to education. Also, Senge's article illustrates the importance attributed to education in modern society. However, Bertrand and Schoar (2003) found that younger managers, and to an extent those with MBA degrees tend to spend less on research and development, which can be said to contradict what Senge (1990) calls a *learning organization*. Of further interest is that Martelli and Abels (2010) found that a large part of managers held degrees in business. This, combined with the seemingly greater emphasis placed on the level of education seems to suggest that there might indeed be a risk of management becoming distanced from its subordinates. However, one also needs to consider the educational attainments of subordinates.



## **Methodology**

### **Literature review**

The literature review was conducted by initially searching for material, mostly research articles, using keywords within the immediate realm of *leadership* and *education*. When doing so, other areas of interest were discovered, *social psychology* being a prominent example. Areas such as *social identity theory* and research related to *trust* stood out as particularly interesting for the purpose at hand. A wide range of material from this area was examined, both for the sake its own contribution and also the previous research cited and described within these works, which proved to be an invaluable way of finding further areas and works of interest. By doing this, the authors formed an understanding of the various components relevant to the purpose of the study. Early in this process, it became apparent that the body of research within the particular field of research was meager. There were however several adjacent fields that contained relevant studies, such as those mentioned previously in this section. This meant that a literature review of the kind Bryman and Bell (2013) refers to as *synthesised* was best suited given the circumstances at hand. In practice, this meant that material from several different fields of research was combined to form a whole.

### **Research approach**

It was decided that a qualitative approach would be appropriate for the purpose at hand, as a deeper understanding of the phenomena was sought. According to Bryman and Bell (2013), such an approach puts an emphasis on interpretation, as opposed to quantification, which seemed more relevant for a study of this particular sort, as an answer not only to *if*, but also *how* and *why* the research questions could be applied was sought. Practically, the research was conducted through what Bryman and Bell (2013) refer to as *comparative design*, in which a phenomenon is observed in several different contexts and compared between them. Thus, the validity of the research questions had to be examined within several organizational contexts. It could be argued that the comparative aspect of this method would result in a preference for organizations with differences in relevant factors, primarily related to

education, between them, which was also considered when looking for organizations who were willing to participate, although certain difficulties in finding participants (discussed in greater detail later in this text) meant that such differences were not observable in the organizations included in the study. Ideally, a mix of organizations with varying levels of educational differences between various groups of employees, particularly managers and subordinates, would best facilitate such a comparison, while the organizations included in the study in many ways had employees, or participants, with relatively homogenous forms of education.

Bryman and Bell (2013) argue that a comparative design with a qualitative approach takes the form of a multiple case study, with two or more *cases*, which in this study is the same as organizations, are compared. According to them, the main argument for using this form of design with a qualitative approach is the way in which it simplifies the development of a theory, as it makes it possible to see in which cases a theory holds true.

### **Selection**

It was also established, considering the scope of the assignment and limitations in terms of time, that three organizations were to be included in the study. In each of these organizations, one leader/manager and three subordinates were to be interviewed. However, due to difficulties in finding organizations willing to participate, only one subordinate could be interviewed in two of the organizations, in addition to the leader. This does inevitably reduce the usefulness of studying this particular organization, though at the same time the answers given by the leader and subordinate about the workplace were highly consistent, which could indicate that they are representative for the actual situation, thereby reducing the need for further interviews, Bryman and Bell (2013) refers to this as saturation. Also, the addition of a fourth organization could partially make up for this, even if only one subordinate could be interviewed in this organization as well.

The process of finding organizations willing to participate in the study turned out to be more difficult than first thought. Initially, an e-mail was distributed to a wide range of organizations, such as municipal administrations, bank offices, political parties, religious organizations and various businesses, privately and publicly owned.

In order to avoid bias in the selection of organizations studied, as well as the answers to questions asked, organizations related to the authors and relatives of the authors were initially avoided. As time passed, it became apparent that finding participants by sending e-mails was not an effective approach, in spite of several changes to the letter used.

Despite distributing the letters to around 50 organizations, few even answered and none of those initially answering was interested in taking part. After consulting with the mentor regarding the issue, relatives to the authors were approached, which resulted in two organizations willing to participate. Another method used was to physically visit the offices of banks and insurance and real estate agents, which resulted in finding one business, a local bank office in a suburb of Gothenburg, willing to take part. Eventually, one of the many organizations contacted through e-mail responded positively, though this was well after the time span during which the interviews were initially planned to take place, which meant that only a superior and one subordinate could be interviewed. At this point, the desired three organizations were already found, although only one subordinate had been interviewed in one of them. Therefore, it was decided to include this fourth organization in the study, in order to compensate for the potential lack of data originating from only being able to interview one subordinate at another organization.

The letter used was formulated in a simple way, while explaining things considered relevant for the organizations, such as the estimated time needed for the interviews, the dates during which it would need to be conducted and the general topic of interest. The initial distribution of this letter occurred several weeks ahead of the time when the interviews were to be conducted according to the initial time schedule, though several rounds of additional distributions to other organizations were conducted after this.

## **Interview construction and implementation**

Because the study takes a qualitative approach, the choice of interview form stood between the *unstructured* and *semi-structured* forms described by Bryman and Bell (2013). One of the factors determining whether to choose an unstructured or a semi-structured form is, according to Bryman and Bell (2013), the level of clarity in the focus of the research, where a higher degree of focus on a specific question makes the latter form more suitable. Also, Bryman and Bell (2013) argue that the kind of comparison required in a multiple case study makes the semi-structured form preferable.

Consequently, the semi-structured form was selected, which means that the questions asked were relatively short, simple and few, letting the interviewee speak freely about the topic at hand. To remove distractions, the questions were primarily asked by one of the interviewers, while the other remained passively listening and occasionally asked complementary questions.

After selecting the form of interview, a template of interview questions was made. This was done in accordance with what Bryman and Bell (2013) describe to be a suitable approach. In order to avoid revealing too much about what was being sought and thereby create bias, the template started with general questions about workplace relations, leadership and the respondent's role in the organization. It then gradually moved into the topic of education, eventually arriving at questions closely and concretely related to the research questions of this study. In addition to avoiding to reveal the purpose of the study, this also served to open the respondents to the general topic and make them feel more comfortable and relaxed, helping them think freely about the topics raised.

Another method used to prevent distractions was recording the interviews and transcribing afterwards, rather than taking notes during the interviews. Each interview lasted for around 20 minutes and the interviewees themselves talked for most of that time, without interjections from the interviewers. Recording and transcribing the interview also brings other advantages. Bryman and Bell (2013) mention the increased ability to analyse the interview retrospectively as one of these, which is another strong reason to why this particular method was chosen.

After the interviews were transcribed, they were summarised in writing and analysed. The transcription and analysis of the texts was conducted as soon as possible after each interview, when the recollection of them was as recent and useful as possible. Also, Bryman and Bell (2013) argue that this can make it possible to detect certain areas to be examined more closely in subsequent interviews.

When the interviews had been transcribed and summarised, they were analysed as a whole, with particular emphasis on their connection to and implications for the research questions and purpose of this study. Further, a deliberate choice was made regarding letting all the respondents be completely anonymous, as writing their complete names was not deemed to increase the quality of the research. Further, Bryman & Bell (2013) name *confidentiality* and *anonymity* as an ethical principle applied in research, which means that information about participants is to be kept secret and protected from unauthorised access.

With the exception of one of the interviews, they were all conducted with one interviewee at a time. In the one interview where this did not occur, two interviewees were interviewed simultaneously, similar to something Bryman and Bell (2013) describe as a *focus group*, although with fewer interviewees than the minimum of four stated in their description. This was primarily for the convenience of the interviewees, who did not have much time to spare at that particular time. The answers from this particular interview did not seem to differ very much from other interviews, though one could possibly suspect that there might be a risk that the interviewees would answer in an overly consenting way in order to avoid disagreements, in line with arguments presented by Bryman and Bell (2013). However, the interviewees seemed very keen on expressing their personal opinions, even in cases where they contradicted each other. Overall, their answers were however very similar. Also, interviewing them both at the same time caused discussions, rather than just reflections, on the topics raised in the interview, which may very well have added to the depth of the information, also something that Bryman and Bell (2013) mention as an advantage of the focus group method.

When presenting and analysing the data from a qualitative study such as this one, Bryman and Bell (2013) argue that it is important to be able to omit large parts of the collected data. In this study, this was certainly applicable. A large amount of data regarding things such as

the various difficulties of being a teacher was collected, which may be very interesting in other areas of research, though not for the purpose of this particular study.

Therefore, the presentation of the results of the interviews has been made with this very much in mind, focusing on the data that is of interest for the study, while also keeping in mind that contextual factors do matter and that the imaginary border between relevant and irrelevant information is highly ambiguous and indefinite. Thus, information deemed relevant for the purpose and the analysis has been the main focus of the presentation.

### **Methodology criticism**

There are several things that may have a negative effect on the validity of this study. First and foremost, the interviews were conducted at the physical workplaces of the interviewees, who all knew that their manager or subordinates would also be interviewed. Thus, one may perhaps suspect that they would have been somewhat restrained with giving negative answers about their colleagues and the organizations at which they work. One could particularly speculate that this would be the case in organizations where the manager on his or her own selected a subordinate to be interviewed, which was the case in the bank office. Perhaps in accordance with this, the subordinate that was interviewed in that organization seemed to almost exclusively give positive answers about her superior and workplace. On the contrary, the principal of the upper secondary school did not even know which subordinates were interviewed, which may have been reflected in the fact that none of the three interviewees in that organization seemed to show much restraint in terms of conveying negative opinions about their superior and workplace, though they did also emphasise that they were pleased with their superior as a whole. Of course, one could argue that a lack of negative opinions in the replies of a respondent could just be an honest reflection of a lack of negative sentiments.

The number of interviewees in the organizations in the study varied, which may have had a negative effect on the ability to make comparisons between them and to generally draw conclusions related to the organizations where few respondents were available. This problem could possibly have been avoided by seeking participants through personal acquaintances at an earlier stage, rather than attempting to do so by e-mail, which would also have enabled the interviews to be conducted at an earlier stage, leaving more time for analysing them.

Also, as the time given for this research is restricted and a relatively low amount of interviews has been made, the scope of the study is rather limited. In addition to the limited scope, one can argue that this specific topic is quite complex as it seems to be relatively complicated to assess the educational impact on a manager's leadership character, as the leadership often seems to be a result of factors like personal character, core values and experiences, rather than just the education itself.

Therefore, there have for instance been some complications with designing interview questions just focusing on the educational impact on the leadership itself and furthermore, it has also been difficult to judge the education as the dependent factor in the respondent's answers.

Taking these arguments into mind, it should clearly be seen as few meaningful conclusions can be drawn from its results and all discussion and conclusions in this research should be interpreted with caution.

Because of the fact that two of the four organizations in the study were schools, a certain bias in the form of an excessive representation of this particular professional group can certainly be found in the study. Schools, as organizations, are of interest for the study due to the strong common identity of teachers, although this rather homogenous professional identity should ideally have been compared to at least one form of organization where the educational and professional identities of co-workers are more heterogeneous, which was not fully possible with the organizations partaking in the study. Nevertheless, the schools did prove to be a useful source of information about organizations with homogenous professional identities.

The literature review covers a wide range of research from various cultural and temporal contexts. Considering this, one may question its applicability for the context in which the study has been undertaken. However, this was done out of necessity, as very little previous research in the field was available. Also, one could perhaps expect the general topic of interpersonal relations to be largely persistent in its nature, which could serve to reduce the potentially adverse effects.

## **Results**

### **Primary school**

The first interview was conducted among the staff of a primary school in a suburban area outside of Gothenburg. The area in question is socioeconomically troubled and contains a large population of various forms of immigrants. The “manager” in question was one of two principals at the school. The responsibilities of the principals was formally distributed in such a way that one of them was responsible for years 1-3 and the other for years 4-6, though in practice this did not seem to be observed very stringently, as the teachers interviewed did not seem to know which principal was responsible for themselves. In addition to the principal, three teachers were interviewed. Both the principal and the teachers belonged to the year 1-3 category. In terms of education, all the teachers had similar qualifications, the main difference being the additional education taken by the principal, related to working as a principal, and the university courses in subjects other than pedagogics taken by one of the teachers, a teacher who had also studied to be an upper secondary school teacher, rather than an primary school teacher.

#### Interview with the principal of primary school 1

The principal in question has worked on the school for 32 years and is due to retire by this summer (the year of 2015). She started by working as a teacher, then progressed through the hierarchy to the post of assistant principal. A few years ago, a restructuring occurred, through which the position of assistant principal was removed and a system of two nominally equal principals with shared responsibilities was adopted. By this process, the interviewee became one of two principals of the school. The other principal has worked at the school for a similar length of time and the two have worked closely together for many years. They share responsibilities for certain economical and administrative tasks, while the interviewee has the primary responsibility for years 1-3, her colleague being responsible for years 4-6.



The interviewee describes the general mood at the workplace as very positive, emphasising the high ratings scored in employee surveys, which the interviewee takes a great deal of pride in. She describes the workplace as not having a significant degree of hierarchy and considers her own leadership to be based primarily on relations to subordinates, pupils and pupils' parents. Relations make up a recurring theme in her answers and she empathises their importance in facilitating a clear and direct form of communication regarding both positive and negative matters. Another point she emphasises is the importance of understanding the profession and its many complexities, for which she considers education and experience to be important factors, particularly stressing experience. An example of this is the education she had to undertake when she became a principal, which she largely considered unimportant and not causing any noticeable changes in her way of practicing her profession, though this can also be related to the fact that she knew in advance that she was due to retire in just little over one year after finishing said course.

Speaking further on the topic of education, she mentioned that the primary difference in education among the teachers of the school is that regarding the age of pupils one is educated to teach. Most of the teachers are educated for teaching pupils in years 1-6, though a few are instead upper secondary school teachers who for various reasons have ended up working at the school, primarily because of difficulties in finding jobs in upper secondary schools, but also because they have found it more to their liking. The interviewee herself is educated as a primary school teacher. In addition to this, she has also undergone various forms of further training while professionally active. When she became a principal, she had to undergo a three-year education specifically related to this profession. She described it as interesting, though her motivation was not very high due in part to the stress of conducting these studies while working, and also because, as mentioned above, she knew in advance that she was going to retire shortly after finishing the education.

When speaking about her own strengths and weaknesses as a leader, she mentions the ability to create a good and pleasant working environment with good interpersonal relations as a strength, while pointing out an unwillingness towards "negative" or uncomfortable decisions as her primary weakness. She does not consider her role as principal to be causing her to be distanced from her subordinate teachers, rather she describes her role as part of the whole, although being a principal inevitably puts her in a specific position.

### Interview with teacher 1

This teacher works in years 1-3. She is educated as a primary school teacher and does not mention having any additional form of education. She describes her relation with the principal as being rather mixed, with certain difficulties and complaints related to the principals, in her opinion, treating their subordinates differently, primarily favouring those who have worked with her for a long time and seek contact with her in regards to operational matters, and not sharing enough influence with those outside of that favoured group. The interviewee herself is active within a trade union and expresses discontent with what she considers a lack of willingness from the principals to cooperate with trade union representatives. On the other hand, she considers the principal to be coherent and trusting, also praising what she considers a generally positive mood at the workplace. A point worth noting is that she speaks about both of the principals as a unit, not differentiating much between them. In her opinion, they are best friends, having worked together for 35 years, and it is not very obvious that their leadership is shared in regards to various years. She describes one of them as vague and difficult to understand, whereas the other is clearer.

When asked about her opinion of a good leadership, she specifically emphasises the importance of making all co-workers feel like active participants, without omitting anyone.

In regards to education, she does not feel that the principals treat her differently because of her level of education, though at the same time, she thinks that they could possibly have treated her differently if she had had a higher level of education, for example if she had taken some form of leadership education, which she thinks could have given her a higher degree of influence. When asked about whether she thinks this hypothetically improved treatment would depend on an actual skill improvement, or the social status improvement originating from having a higher degree of education, she believes both to be important, though she also points out the additional role played by the accompanying increase in self-confidence associated with a higher degree of education.

Most of her close colleagues hold a similar education, though she is also aware that one of them is an upper secondary school teacher. She thinks that such teachers should not really work in an primary school, since the difference between small children and those who are almost adults is too great, while at the same time pointing out that her colleague with that form of education is a good teacher, and that the pedagogic ability is the most important part. In her opinion, such teachers face a tough task adapting to such a different form of pupils to that for which they have been educated.

### Interview with teacher 2

This teacher also works in years 1-3 and she is at the moment teacher for a class in year one, together with “teacher 3”. She is different from the other teachers working at this school in that she is actually an educated upper secondary school teacher and is therefore not primarily educated for working on a primary school. Moreover, she also has some additional education in terms of university courses in political science, human ecology and sports science.

She describes her relation to the principals as decent, praising them for being concerned about their subordinates’ well-being and working hard to create a good atmosphere at the workplace. In her opinion, the most vital component for a good leadership at this kind of workplace is to work for the best of teachers and pupils, to stand up for them rather than focusing on budget tracking, and argues that just this is one of the principals’ greatest strengths. On the other hand, she claims that she has little connection to the principals and is mainly just in touch with them during specific meetings. In addition to that, this teacher is not at all aware of which of the two principals is working with years 1-3 and which is working with years 4-6, as she experiences that they are just working tightly together and sharing job assignments rather than focusing on different years.

The fact that one of the principals is a fully educated principal, while the other principal lacks the full education, is not something that has concerned this teacher and she has not experienced any competence problems with the non-educated principal due to her lack of the specific education. Instead, she believes that the way someone leads or manages is more a result of the personality, rather than the type of education the specific person has.

In her opinion, one of the most central benefits with the principals working at this school for such a long time is that they really do care and are so passionate about this school and specific suburban area. On the other hand, working for such a long time at the same workplace could unfortunately result in lack of perspective and ability to see things from another point of view, according to her.

The main weakness with the principals affecting the workplace is the degree of hierarchy that exists within this school. The interviewee does not see all the staff as one tight unit, as there seems to be a step up to the principals. She states that it not seems to be acceptable to express all different kinds of problems or questions, rather, one has to choose accurately and with caution what to ask or discuss with the principals. Also, the timely perspective is central to take in mind before discussing problems or questions with them, she explains. She also believes and has experienced that the abovementioned problems differ depending on who is discussing problems or asking the principals questions. She believes that the longer teachers have worked at the school (and therefore know the principals better), the fewer problems they will experience concerning discussing problems with the principals, as a long working experience at the school may lead to authority and reputation.

Speaking further on the topic of education and how it could affect her relation to the principals, she says that *“I think that they possibly had treated me differently if I had a higher level of education and for instance any kind of leadership education. If that was the case, I might have had a higher degree of influence on the principals.”*

Finally, she states that she has not experienced any social or reputation problems concerning the fact that she lacks the education for primary school, but as she earlier has worked as teacher at an upper secondary school, she has experienced one certain, specific difference between the two types of schools. She says that teachers working with pupils this young tend to be more cautious about demanding and setting requirements towards principals, compared to those teachers working with older students. She speculates about the reason and believes it could depend on when the specific teacher got his or her education and therefore to which extent the specific teacher got education about thinking and reasoning critically.

### Interview with teacher 3

This teacher has been working at this school for 26 years and she is educated as an primary school teacher. This teacher also works in years 1-3 and describes her relation to both principals as great and especially good to the one responsible for years 1-3, as she feels that this principal really trusts her.

The teacher explains that the school was exposed to criticism after an inspection by the National Agency for Education because both principals were working together with the same job assignments, rather than being specialised on years 1-3 and years 4-6. Since the school was criticised, the principals have changed the structure and each of them are now formally responsible for either years 1-3 or years 4-6, according to this teacher. But in fact, she says that they are working together as they did before, the change was just related to the formal structure of the organization.

She describes herself as a comfortable and confident teacher nowadays, even though this have changed since she started to work at the school. Initially, during her early years as a teacher, she was more withdrawn and shy but that she have developed as a teacher while she has been working at the school.

This teachers' definition of a good leadership is mainly related to clear structure and direct leadership but at the same time it is central for a leader or manager to possess the ability and skills to handle people, treating them well and to really care about the staff. In her opinion, taking care about the staff is both of the principals' main strength - they are really open and both of them have a high degree of empathy if there, for instance, would be any teacher with personal problems. On the other hand, this high degree of empathy and understanding could also turn into their general weakness as these attributes could lead them to be afraid of conflicts and therefore not being brave enough to criticise teachers that not perform or act optimally, according to her.

Apart from being so afraid of conflicts, both principals' main weakness is that they are putting too heavy focus on administrative tasks and aspects as budgets and the school's economy, while it instead would be desirable if they were able to put more effort into developing the teachers' ability to pedagogic teaching.

Both of the principals at this school are educated teachers, as they worked as teachers before getting their current jobs. The one formally responsible for years 4-6 started to work as a principal before the other one and is moreover fully educated as a principal, while the other one, responsible for years 1-3, did lack principal education until the inspection mentioned above was completed. This led to criticism and forced her to starting the education, but according to this teacher, this principal did never finish the whole procedure and education.

The teacher declares that she does not feel neither competence differences between them nor any difference regarding how the principal responsible for years 1-3 acts or manages her job before and after she started her non-completed education. However, she points out one special difference - as the principal responsible for years 4-6 was educated and got her job first, she is the one making the crucial decisions and is therefore the one with highest status within the organization. The other principal always discusses problems and important decisions with her, but it is never vice versa, according to the teacher.

Concerning the teachers with education for upper secondary school, she claims that none of the other teachers considers them inferior or different, even though teaching young children versus pupils almost being adults is widely different tasks. This teacher is confident that the work as a teacher is more related to the personality and effort rather than specific education. However, she argues that leisure-time pedagogues working at the school may feel that they are being treated in a slightly different way, as they often feel that they have a low social status at the workplace due to their education and working tasks.

### **Upper secondary school**

This organization is an upper secondary school in a suburb of Gothenburg, which can be described as being relatively affluent, with a low degree of social problems. There are a multitude of programs on the school, of which the principal in question is responsible for three. This responsibility includes the teachers and pupils of said programs, as well as a economy and administration. The latter two of these responsibilities are shared among the various principals of the school. There are around 30-40 teachers who can be considered subordinates of the principal. Above the principals in the organizational hierarchy, there is also a school director who carries the overall responsibility for the school.

### Interview with the principal

The interviewee is an educated upper secondary school teacher in the subjects of mathematics and science. In the process of becoming a principal, she attended a three-year education, while at the same time working as a principal. She has previously worked as a teacher in at least one other school, which is where she first became a principal, though she started working at her current workplace before finishing the education related to becoming a principal.

She considers herself to be relatively close to her subordinates and views her leadership as based on giving orders. Teachers, in her opinion, are leaders themselves, which makes it difficult for a principal to “lead” them. In general, she does not consider the school to be very hierarchical. As a leader, she views her strengths to primarily be related to her being committed, emphatic and intimate, while her main weakness in the role as a leader is a dislike of making people sad, for example during negotiations about salaries. She describes the general mood at the workplace to be good, with several co-workers socialising privately as well as at the workplace, although layoffs due to economic saving measures have occurred in recent years, which has had a somewhat negative influence. Her own view of a good leadership emphasises being close to subordinates, while at the same time being clear in terms of communication and vision, in regards to where the organization is heading. Specifically important for a principal is, in her opinion, is to have proper insight in pedagogics. She believes in a leadership that builds upon the qualities of the leader as a person, in contrast to playing a role, which she very much does not believe in. The education she underwent while becoming a principal was mostly related to leadership and other subjects related to being a principal. She considered the education highly useful and interesting, although not having a great effect on her way of exercising her profession, other than increasing her confidence. She also believes that her subordinates feel more confident about her leadership as an effect of the education.

In regards to the education of her subordinates, all, except for one teacher who teaches a practical subject, are authorised and educated upper secondary school teachers. The interviewee does not consider her relation to the non-educated teacher to be affected by his lack of education, although she believes that the situation would have been different if the teacher in question was teaching a different subject, such as mathematics, both because of a suspected lack of competence and a lack of trust.

#### Interview with teachers 1 and 2

In this interview, two teachers were interviewed simultaneously. They are both primarily teachers in various social studies subjects, in addition to other responsibilities. One of them is responsible for a program within social studies and the other is responsible for a subject within the same area, in addition to a recurring event at the school. These responsibilities in themselves put them both in forms of leader positions, although this is not their primary role within the organization. They both point out that they do not, considering these positions, view themselves as leaders, rather identifying themselves as coaches and coordinators. In regards to education, they are both highly educated. In addition to degrees as upper secondary teachers in the subject in which they are active, they both have additional degrees in subjects related to those in which they teach.

Speaking further on the topic of leadership, they believe that leading teachers is particularly difficult, given that the professional role of a teacher very much includes a form of leadership in regards to the pupils. A team of teachers, in their opinion, does not work in a hierarchical way, rather through mutual cooperation and sharing of responsibilities. Another aspect of this is that it would be more difficult for a principal with no teaching background to be respected by its subordinates. One of the interviewees further adds that he thinks teachers, due to their relatively high level of education, may have high thoughts of themselves and their own abilities. Consequently, they argue that the role of the principal is complex and difficult. A part of the role of the principal, which they consider to be missing, is pedagogic leadership. They speculate that this might depend on the lack of instruments through which such leadership could be practiced, such as the allocation of funds for training, which is not possible when the school no longer supplies such funds. Consequently, they do not feel that this can be blamed on the principal herself, as higher authorities have caused it.



However, one of the interviewees expresses that he would not want to have a strong pedagogic leadership from the principal, rather he finds a simple vision to be more suitable. In the view of the interviewees, the principal practically works primarily with organization and administration, including decisions about salaries, which are not decided through negotiations with the employee in question. They consider this to be caused by the way in which the school is managed, which results in the principals having very little discretion. Rather, such decisions are taken higher up in the administration, often by local politicians, which, according to the interviewees, result in the administration of the school mostly being viewed as an economic matter. Further, they feel as though the administration has a view of the school as being good, but not any plans for how to make it stay in that condition in the future. Despite this criticism of how the school is managed, they point out that the principal, in their opinion, is not to blame, as her position is very difficult.

When asked about their feelings about the principal, they both express satisfaction with her way of dealing with what they consider to be a tough task, while they do feel that she may at times be too personal in her relation with co-workers and subordinates. One of the interviewees in particular finds this slightly uncomfortable given the fact that the principal is the person determining his salary, as he would rather have a greater social distance to that person. The other interviewee stresses that this personal involvement in the professional role, in his opinion, simultaneously is the principal's primary strength and weakness, as it on the one hand causes her to be very committed to what she is doing, and on the other, causes her to take failures and difficulties very personally.

Their ideas of a good leadership revolve around clarity and an idea of where to go and how to get there. In line with this, they also feel that a good leader needs to be able to gain support among subordinates and be responsive to their needs. Also, they feel that a leader needs to be able to delegate wisely. In practice, they feel that a principal in particular needs to have a clear vision to be working with, which needs to be formed in consensus with the teachers. As an example of this, they mention that the principal has, in recent years, worked hard to reshape the organizational structure of the social studies program in accordance with a government reform, which they both believe that she has succeeded well in doing.

The interviewees agree that the general mood on the workplace is good and pleasant, although they do feel that there is at times a “culture of complaining”, particularly regarding things they do not view as justifying such complaints, while the problems they consider more serious are overlooked. In regards to education, many of their colleagues hold similar levels of education as themselves, though they admit that they are possibly among those with higher levels of education. They do not find this to affect their interactions with co-workers and they do not think that the principal is fully aware of their educational attainments. However, they do feel that the social status of teachers has fallen drastically in recent years, which they feel is clearly apparent in that everyone, even people who are not teachers, seem to consider themselves qualified to have opinions regarding various matters related to schools and teaching. Examples of this are the frequent intervention of parents in grading and the high level of control being practiced by politicians who do not have any professional background within education, both of which they interpret as questioning their professional identity and competence as teachers. The low-grade requirements for being accepted into teacher programs in universities are something they view as a possible partial explanation to this. They do not feel that their principal treats them differently because of this decline in the social status of teachers, although they do believe that her role becomes more difficult because of it, as she has a great deal of contact with people further up in the administration who are not familiar with the educational system.

When it comes to the social identity of teachers, they feel as though it is made up of both educational aspects and the profession itself, though the latter more than the former. Education, in their opinion, primarily serves to distinguish between various forms of teachers, such as primary school teachers and upper secondary school teachers.

### Interview with teacher 3

The interviewee works solely as a teacher and does not mention having any other areas of responsibility. She is an educated upper secondary school teacher, with some additional degrees in areas outside of those in which she teaches. Until the autumn of 2014, she worked under the principal interviewed in this study for several years, though organizational changes meant that she now works under another principal. Having worked at the school since the early 1990s, she feels that the current mood at the workplace is very good, though not as good as it was twenty years ago, which she primarily attributes to an increased level of stress caused by a heavier workload. Also, a system of individual salaries has, in her opinion, led to a more competitive atmosphere. However, she considers these things to apply to all upper secondary schools in Sweden and still feels that the school at which she works has a better mood than many others. She considers the organization to be very “flat”, as opposed to hierarchical.

Her opinion of a good leadership in the context in which she works is that it needs to give teachers a high level of freedom and trust. Speaking of the top manager of the school, she feels that the previous person to hold that post very much gave her that, whereas the current one does not do so to the same degree, seemingly controlling the teachers more.

On the topic of the principal interviewed in this study, the interviewee considers her leadership to be typically feminine, which she further elaborates as being personal and committed, though possibly somewhat diffuse, and with great benevolence, possibly even too much. Contrary to this, she considers her current principal to exhibit a masculine leadership, further explained as more distanced, clear and less personal. Her current principal, as well as the previous, has worked as a teacher before becoming a principal, though unlike the principal interviewed in this study, he has taught the same topic as the interviewee mainly teaches. She feels that this improves their relation and makes the principal understand her better.

When asked about the educational credentials of her colleagues, she feels that the topic is not discussed very often and that she generally does not know much about it, although it is clear to her that some colleagues stand out as being significantly more educated than others, which she seems impressed by. In general, she does not feel that the actual knowledge and educational credentials possessed by teachers is not given enough esteem in the school. At the same time, she does not feel that the performance of a teacher is dependent on education, as experience, in her opinion, is just as important. However, she finds it very unlikely, if not impossible, that an uneducated teacher could ever be employed at the school, as that person would find it very difficult to gain trust from co-workers and also because the hiring of such a person would trigger massive protests among employees.

Speaking about her own education as teacher, she feels that it did not give her sufficient knowledge about leadership. She does hold many credits from various university educations, though she does not believe that her principal knows, or is particularly interested in this. Her high level of education, in her opinion, mostly mattered when she started teaching, making her more confident.

### **Bank office**

This organization is a bank office in a suburb of Gothenburg, involving eighteen co-workers with mixed backgrounds and in different ages, as well as two managers.

#### Interview with bank manager

This man has been working within the company for almost thirty years and started working as a manager five years later. He has also worked as an advisor within the bank for a while, but his current official title is deputy office manager. The role of deputy office manager involves for instance personnel responsibility and contributing to their well-being, but also monitoring and working for optimising the economic result, according to himself.

The interviewee claims that he is “well aware” of the good atmosphere pervading the bank office and further maintains that there is no shred of walls between different departments within the office. The personnel group constellation, with co-workers in mixed ages and gender, works out beneficially and is a central factor contributing to the magnificent atmosphere at the office.

Clarity and honesty combined with tongue-in-cheek and joy are important factors for a successful leadership, according to the interviewee’s definition. He argues that his own leadership is characterised by his ability to keep up the atmosphere within the group and to not build any hierarchies, but at the same time also be direct and act with a sense of openness. Furthermore, he associates the role of being a leader at an office to that of being an ice hockey coach, stating that *“It is obviously vital to keep the group together and getting them working towards the same objectives.”* He also points out that his ability to learn from mistakes has certainly contributed to his development of being a better leader.

When the bank manager began his career within the bank almost thirty years ago, a university degree was not necessary to be employed. Due to this, this manager lacks all kind of academic degrees or studies and has therefore only graduated from upper secondary school. He does not perceive this fact as problematic or something that mainly has affected his working life and argues instead that life and work experience are way more important factors in the role of being a manager. *“Even though you have a lot of university credits and student loans, you have to start your career from scratch somewhere and work on before you can be a successful manager.”*

He continues to mention the importance of experience in this sector, claiming that the younger co-workers often tend to be humble to the elderly, well-experienced co-workers as they often are good advisors and are able to manage complex situations or problems well - *“To be old does not mean you have to be gaga, definitely not!”* But at the same time he is also careful to point out that elderly and younger are working in symbiosis, as he hails how the younger employees with their energy and curiosity inspire and push the rest to keep working hard and purposefully. Finally, the respondent concludes that “learning by doing” is the base for development as a leader.

### Interview with bank official

This bank official has an estate agent education and has been working at this bank for a few years. Except for the being an estate agent, she has also attended some economy courses at Gothenburg University. Her tasks at the bank are primarily divided into two main categories - cashier/customer service and simple private economy guidance.

She describes the working climate as excellent, with a tight group of colleagues. The degree of social hierarchy among the subordinates is low, instead they try to support and motivate each other in the process of trying to perform optimally. Even though the group constellation consists of bank officials in rather mixed ages, the degree of coherence is obvious within the group, in her opinion.

The interviewee points out that the manager contributes to the beneficial atmosphere, as he puts much effort into making his subordinates thrive at their workplace, and she further says that her relation to the manager is terrific, given that he is very open-minded, honest, has the ability to listen to his subordinates, always welcomes everyone and is in general a manager caring about humans, in the interviewee's point of view. On the other hand, he tends to put too much effort and focus on numbers, budgets and sale, which could harm and stress the bank official and her colleagues. Moreover, she describes him as a simple and facetious man, but at same time a distinct and clear leader.

The age-diversificated group of colleagues consists of individuals with slightly different backgrounds. Subordinates employed recently tend to be younger bank officials, often with a background of university studies, while employees of higher age instead tend to have been working for decades and are therefore often well experienced.

She is not aware of the manager's education and argues that education is not the most vital factor at this bank as they have got a useful ability to cherish the officials' different abilities and skills in working procedures.

## Church

The fourth workplace in this research is a church, which in fact means that this type of organization differs from those investigated earlier. Firstly, this church involves only two full time employees, as the rest of the people within the organization are volunteering.

Furthermore, in contrast to a school or bank, the church's decision-making organ consists of a council.

### Interview with superior pastor

Together with his pastor colleague, this pastor has the operating responsibility for the church and its organization. The main task for him as a pastor and leader is to coach all volunteers working within the organization and furthermore also work for group cohesiveness.

Regarding leadership, the pastor declares that he sees himself as a team player - working and collaborating together would hopefully lead to everyone finding their specific, optimal position within the group and the organization. On the other hand, he admits that sometimes it is necessary for a leader to act "as a real boss" to be able to solve complex situations, but he also claims that his starting point in the role of a leader is to work for an atmosphere consisting of fun, inspiration and a high degree of creativity.

Further, he mentions the importance of leadership and says that being a leader involves many aspects. He has loved the role of being a leader ever since he was a child and relates this to his Christian faith, as he says that he sees the leader role as his mission from god. The role model is Jesus and the interviewee argues that leadership, in his point of view, is not about power - it is about serving the people. *"You have to gain people's trust and also trust in them. It is about love. The definitely most important aspect as a leader is serving the people and to meet their needs."*

The pastor continues and states that being a leader is his mission, his life and therefore, he feels so confident in this role. This means that working and managing the leader role is not about performance to a wide extent for him as he loves it, but he also admits with clarity that

his leadership abilities and skills certainly are not perfect as he daily works to improve as a leader and he is also well aware about his weaknesses. He turns to an argumentation regarding trust, asking himself how to earn followers' trust and confidence as a leader and claims that if you lack their trust, you will turn into a destructive leader, instead acting with power and authority as the main tools.

The church contrasts other organizations or companies, as employees within a company in some sense get paid to take order or listen to their manager. In this case, it is actually in the opposite direction, as people instead obviously are paying to be a part of the organization. In reality, this means that people within the church are completely free to leave this specific congregation if they do not appreciate the pastor or the way he leads the organization, according to the interviewee. Therefore, he is working for an open atmosphere and is definitely not afraid of conflicts. Conflicts are not supposed to be seen as something negative, in fact, it could rather be something positive, as it could be an indicator of something that has to be changed and furthermore also a central step in the process of solving a problem, he argues. Therefore, he loves it when people are open minded and are brave enough to stand up for their own opinion, as it actually often could lead to problems being solved.

This pastor has a four year long theological university degree, but argues that he was not delighted with the education as it was rarely focused on leadership. Instead, the majority of the four years were purely concentrated on theology. The pastor is ambivalent concerning how the university degree has affected him and his leadership in the role of being a pastor. On the one hand, he mentions the social aspect of the education, considering the fact that the education gave him life experience, an ability to grow as a human and even maturity, which he believes may have improved his confidence as a leader. On the other hand, he believes that he is principally the same type of leader, sharing the same values as he did before starting the education, working as a leader within a church on a volunteer basis, considering that the education itself did not teach him much about leadership.



### Interview with subordinate pastor

This pastor works below the other pastor in the organizational hierarchy. His primary areas of responsibility are related to the church's youth activities. A significant deal of his responsibilities are shared with the other pastor, as they are the only pastors working in this particular church. In general, he has a lot of freedom to choose for himself how to perform his duties. Other people working within the church are mostly doing so as volunteers, which, according to the interviewee, means that one cannot demand as much from them.

The interviewee considers good leadership to be based around leading the way and leading by example, even in times of hardships. He points out Jesus as the prime example, particularly his way of serving his followers and staying true to his principles, even when it eventually lead to his death. Another aspect that the interviewee considers important is the ability to encourage one's followers, particularly in an organization where volunteers make up a substantial share of the workforce.

In regards to his relation to his superior, he considers it to be working very well. His view of the leadership practiced by his superior is that he has an extraordinary ability to engage people, leading the way and motivating them into following.

In addition to being an educated pastor, the interviewee also has as university degree in engineering. He believes that his colleagues, most of whom are volunteers, hold similar levels of education, though in other fields. In his opinion, the education primarily increases his confidence in his professional role. The professional identity as a pastor is strong and generates trust among others. Also, the role as pastor is not something he considers himself to be solely when working, rather he finds it to be a lifestyle, constantly requiring him to be available.

## **Discussion**

### **Analysing the findings in light of previous research**

From the literature review, it can be concluded that previous research within areas deemed relevant indicates several things.

A significant body of research (for example Tajfel, Billig and Bundy, 1971), as described in the literature review, seems to suggest that, in interpersonal relations, people favorise those deemed similar to themselves, where an important factor in determining such similarities is shared group membership. Practically, this can be seen in a multitude of ways. Interestingly, many of the respondents in this study, specifically those working in schools, were highly negative to the idea of teachers with improper education being hired to work alongside them, although they also expressed that such people could become just as good teachers as those with proper education, usually giving some colleague of their own as an example. This can be interpreted as being congruent with the findings of Tanis and Postmes (2005), suggesting that people trust those belonging to the same group as themselves more than those not doing so, although primarily when other cues to personality are absent. It could also be related to Tajfel, Billig and Bundy (1971), in that the in-group is favorised, while the out-group is discriminated. It is worth to note though, that there may very well be more utilitarian explanations to this phenomenon, for example in that an improperly educated teacher is less likely to possess a high level of teaching-related competence than a proper teacher, and also that the Swedish job market for certain forms of teachers, particularly in upper secondary schools, is rather difficult. Activities related to trade unions can also be adduced as a partial explanation, as such unions are generally stringently opposed to actions which can be seen as weakening their own position, which is based around the teacher collective. If schools were to employ people without teaching education for teacher posts, rather than educated teachers, this could arguable be seen as such an action.

In the literature review, it was also discovered that education seemed to be a basis for such *in-group favoritism* described above (Stubager, 2009, Burford, 2012). In the study, signs suggesting that the respondents, teachers in particular, seemed to identify themselves with others holding similar educational attainments as themselves were repeatedly found. An example of this is that teachers preferred to have a principal who had a background of teaching, rather than a background from other areas, such as the military or private enterprises. Also, one of the teachers, having recently started working under a new principal, said that she considered the fact that the new principal was educated and had been teaching in the same subject as herself to be highly positive, improving their relation and increasing the perceived level of mutual understanding.

Another example that could be explained, at least partially, in line with this theory, is how several of the interviewed teachers saw their principals, with a teaching background, to be “on their side” in what they seemingly perceived as a conflict with elements higher up in the school administration, such as politicians and various officials. This could perhaps also be connected to Stubager’s (2009) finding that there is a perceived conflict between various educational groups, although, again, it could also be explained by other phenomena, such as an lack of understanding of school business from politicians.

Leader-subordinate relations tend to be rated higher by subordinates if personality congruence is high, as noted by Zaman Bin Ahmad (2008). The findings in this study seem to support this view, particularly what was mentioned above about a female teacher who talked about feeling a high degree of understanding of the feminine aspects of her previous principal’s leadership, as opposed to what she perceived as a masculine leadership from her new principal. Similarly, the apparent preference, at least among teachers, for a superior with a professional background similar to the respondent’s could also be interpreted as in agreement with Zaman Bin Ahmad (2008).

Given the results in the study, one could perhaps argue that Burford’s (2012) arguments about medical education and social identity theory could be applied to other forms of education as well, for example teacher education, or leadership education in general, as the social behaviour of teachers, which incidentally was the professional group mainly represented in this study, in many ways seems to resemble that of doctors, as described by Burford (2012). Examples of this is that teachers seem to identify themselves with other

teachers, while also distinguishing between various forms of teachers, such as those working in primary schools and those working in upper secondary schools. Burford (2012) argued that medical professionals had problems interacting with other professional groups as an effect of their strong social identity. The results of this study could suggest that teachers have similar problems. As mentioned above, there seems to be a conflict between teachers and elements higher up in the administration. In addition to the possible explanations stated in that section, one could perhaps also argue that Burford's (2012) findings could be of relevance for explaining that conflict, as it could then be seen as an effect of teachers having difficulties in communicating with other professions. Also, it could be suspected that this may very well apply to other professional groups as well.

Gillespie and Mann (2004) state that the extent to which followers share common values with their leaders is associated with establishing trust in the specific leader. This specific pattern could easily be related to both of the interviewed principals and the teachers working as their subordinates. As both of the principals in this study had experience of working as teachers, they can be said to share the values associated with being a teacher and also the knowledge of what it takes to be a teacher, according to several teacher respondents. Further, this meant that the principals working at the upper secondary school sided with the teachers during the negotiations with municipal administration.

### **General tendencies**

The empirical data collection made in this study indicates a couple of general tendencies regarding the role of education within a specific work related context and furthermore the two research questions of this study.

#### The social aspect of education

One of these considers something that potentially could be called the *social aspect of the education level*, as the education level has turned out to sometimes affect the social interaction between workers, according to several respondents and their answers in the data collection. Furthermore, this social aspect can be divided into two specific, underlying categories.

Firstly, education seems to have a positive impact on each individual's status among colleagues and in the relation to the individual's manager. Concrete examples contributing to this pattern and analyse could for example be the teacher working on the primary school, in the result part referred to as "Teacher 2" saying: *"I think that they possibly had treated me differently if I had a higher level of education and for instance any kind of leadership education. If that was the case, I might have had a higher degree of influence on the principals."*

Another example is from the same school, but mentioned by the one referred to as "Teacher 3". She claimed that leisure-time pedagogues working at the school sometimes feel that they are being treated in an inferior way and worse than the teachers due to their reputation and lack of "high-level education". This could be related to Tajfel, Billig and Bundy (1971), in that one group seems to discriminate the other. Also, Stubager (2009) found that there is state of conflict between low and high education groups, which could serve as a partial explanation.

Further, as stated in the result part, one of the two principals at the upper secondary school was a fully educated principal, while the other one worked for a long time lacking the right education and started the education late in her career (but never completed it). According to one of the teachers, the one with full education was the one with highest internal status among the principals and she was the one taking the most vital decisions, even though both of them were equally good at performing as principals, according to this teacher's opinion.

The other main category within the social aspect mentioned above concerns the sense of confidence, comfort and self-esteem the education seems to give the educated individual. A clear example of this impact on workers could be the principal at the upper secondary school discussing her education. She started her work as a principal before undergoing the principal education and was therefore able to reflect on the educational impact on herself as a principal and leader. She claimed that the education had negligible influence on her exercising as principal, but the education as a whole increased her confidence and she also believed that her subordinates are feeling more confident about her leadership after she has finished the education.

The same tendency could also be seen in the interview with the superior pastor. He stated that the main benefit with the four year long theology education was letting him grow as a human, to mature and in general feeling more confident as a leader, at the same time stating that the education had little impact on his leadership skills.

The younger pastor took the same approach as his colleague, claiming that the pure education had weak impact on his leadership, but on the other hand, the education has given him the title as pastor and the pastor title itself both gives himself confidence and commands trust among people working under or with him.

This observed pattern could possibly be associated to the findings of Gillespie and Mann (2004), which state that subordinates perceive a leader with a more active style of leadership in a more positive way, contributing to a higher degree of trust in the leader. As the interviewees seemed to exhibit a higher degree of confidence as leaders in light of their educational attainments, this could possibly lead to a more active leadership style, thereby yielding an improved level of trust in the relation with subordinates.

#### The educational impact on the leadership

Another main tendency found by the data collection illuminates the education level's impact on the specific leader's leaderships competency and furthermore his or her ability to manage and lead.

This tendency suggests that the specific education level, or education as a whole, tends to affect the leadership and leadership skills to a trivial or negligible extent. Both the pastor and the principal at the upper secondary school brought almost identical argumentations regarding this topic, claiming that the education itself did not have a great impact on their way of exercising their professions, except for the social aspect already mentioned, involving increased confidence. Instead, both of them argued that the leadership character primarily is the result of individual qualities, personal values and character, rather than educational qualifications. Moreover, both of them stated that they were the same type of leader, with approximately the same core values, weaknesses and strengths before as they are now, after undergoing their educations and as both of them had experience of operating as leaders in

different contexts, even before undergoing their education studies, they were able to judge the educational impact on themselves as leaders with certainty.

Another observation consolidating the pattern of the weak educational impact on the leadership ability and competency was illustrated by the teacher working at the primary school, in the data collection referred to as “Teacher 3”. Having worked at this school for more than 25 years means that she has been working with both of the current principals when they were operating as teachers and therefore has witnessed both of them progressing through the hierarchy to the posts of principals. Even though the principal responsible for years 1-3 initially lacked the formal, full principal education, in contrast to the one responsible for years 4-6, the teacher never experienced any competency differences between the two principals regarding their leadership skills. Moreover, staying so long at the same workplace has given her the opportunity to judge the principal responsible for years 1-3 before and after undergoing the (unfinished) principal education. This education did not have any obvious impact on her ability to operate as a leader, according to the teacher.

Finally, the perception of the bank manager, lacking university education, indicates the same tendency, as the interviewed subordinate within the bank claimed she was almost fully satisfied with his way of treating the co-workers within the bank and leading the organization as a whole. This manager’s leadership ability was not perceived as different to other managers in this research due to his lack of education and both the interviewed subordinate and the manager himself argued that work experience and “learning by doing” contribute to a good leadership, rather than theoretical education. In general, both the manager and the subordinate of this organization seemed very positive and congruent in their answers, particularly regarding the mood and interpersonal relations of the workplace. This could possibly be related to Stubagers (2009) finding that individuals with higher degrees of education tend to identify themselves with others of similar educational level more than those with low levels of education, as one could then speculate that the lower educational level of the manager could make him less predisposed to identifying himself solely with others of a similar educational level, thereby reducing the presence of educational groups within the organization.

In summary, the pattern that could be seen here shows that the way someone acts as a leader is a result of specific personality, character, experience and personal values rather than the outcome of university courses or education degrees in general.

Consequently, as mentioned above, the education and education level, according to the respondents in this research, seems to have a greater impact on social interaction within a workplace, rather than on the leadership ability and leadership competence itself.



## Conclusions

It is important to note that the scope of this study is rather limited, which means that few conclusions can be drawn from its results, particularly if one considers the complexity of the topic. Thus, all analysis and conclusions in this study should be interpreted with a high degree of caution.

However, the results found by the empirical data collection show a couple of indications regarding the role of education in the relation between manager and subordinate and how the education affects the leadership character in general.

Firstly, the study shows that the education can have a “social impact”, both in the relation between manager and subordinate and on the manager itself. This could be further divided into two categories. On the one hand, education seems to affect a subordinate’s or manager’s social status and authority within the group. On the other hand, education seems to have a positive impact on a personal level, as the education could increase one’s self-esteem, comfort and confidence as a leader.

Another interesting finding, which also seems to echo those of previous research, is that education, through its role in the formation of professional identities, seems to be a factor in the creation of various forms of groups. For example, the professional identity of teachers appears to be very strong and to a large extent based upon the common education. The formation of such groups, as proven by previous research, can have significant effects on the social interactions of humans, which indicates that they should perhaps be given more attention, for example by considering and further examining the role of education in this process.

Finally, this study indicates that the education on its own has a weak, if any, impact, on a leader’s or manager’s leadership character. Instead, the way in which someone operates as a leader or manager seems to be influenced by personal core values, character, and life and work experience, rather than the education itself. This is of particular interest if one considers the seemingly increasing emphasis placed on leadership education, and education in general.

## **Recommendations**

As stated earlier in this text, the two research questions in this study are rather complex and the process of trying to answer them has not been entirely uncomplicated. The main benefit of a qualitative research methodology is the gathering of details and ability to come up with follow-up questions, but on the other hand, as earlier discussed within this study, it is quite complicated to draw conclusions with certainty about this sort of complex topic with just 12 respondents.

Therefore, it would probably be interesting to investigate the topic of this research with an quantitative approach and therefore be able to increase the number of respondents. Moreover, instead of asking them about descriptive, personal opinions regarding their manager or their own leadership, it could be preferable to let them express their views within a numeric scale. It would probably be easier to judge the educational impact on the leadership etcetera with this kind of methodology approach, although it would also be likely to give a lower level of understanding of actual phenomena than a qualitative approach.

Another suggestion for further studies within this topic is to really observe managers and subordinates acting/working in their organization, for example through an ethnographic study, as it would probably increase the reliability and objectivity compared to relying on their respondents own, subjective opinions about the leadership.

The subject of this study could also be studied in the light of organizational culture and identity. Alvesson (n.d.) argues that a strong positive organizational culture creates a unified organizational identity, which decreases the likeliness of sub-cultural groups forming within the organization, such as between factory and office workers. It could then be assumed that educational sub-groups within an organization should be less likely to form in an organization with a stronger organizational culture or identity, which could be examined in further research.

Stubager (2012) suggested that medical education might benefit from the application of social identity. The findings of this study may suggest that this could also apply to other educational groups, such as that of teachers. Consequently, it could be of interest for researchers to examine if this assumption holds true for other forms of education as well.

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## **Appendix: Interview questions**

Först: introduktion av oss själva, vilka vi är, vad vi vill göra och varför vi är här. Dock inte avslöja syftet helt och hållet då det kan styra respondenternas svar.

*First: Presentation of ourselves, who we are, what we are looking to do and why we are here. Avoid revealing the purpose of the study, as this may affect the respondents' answers.*

### **Till underordnade**

#### ***For subordinates***

Berätta om din roll i organisationen.

*Tell us about your role in the organization*

Hur uppfattar du din roll i samspelet på arbetsplatsen?

*How do you perceive your role in workplace interactions?*

Hur uppfattar du stämningen på arbetsplatsen?

*How do you perceive the mood at the workplace?*

Vad är ett bra ledarskap enligt dig?

*In your opinion, what is a good leadership?*

Hur uppfattar du din chefs ledarstil? Fördelar och nackdelar?

*How do you perceive your manager's style of leadership? Advantages and disadvantages?*

Hur uppfattar du relationen till din chef?

*How do you perceive the relation to your manager?*

Vad har du för utbildning?

*What kind of education do you hold?*

Hur skiljer sig din utbildning från övriga medarbetares?

*How does your education differ from that of co-workers?*

Vad har din chef för utbildning?

*What kind of education does your manager hold?*

Identifierar du dig med din chef?

*Do you identify with your manager?*

Tror du att din utbildning har påverkat din chefs ledarskapsstil. I så fall hur?

*Do you think that your education has affected your manager's style of leadership? If so, how?*

Tror du att utbildning har någon påverkan på relationen till din chef?

*Do you think education affects your relation to your manager?*

### **Till ledare/chefer**

#### ***For leaders/managers***

Berätta om din roll i organisationen.

*Tell us about your role in the organization*

Hur uppfattar du din roll i samspelet på arbetsplatsen?

*How do you perceive your role in workplace interactions?*

Hur uppfattar du stämningen på arbetsplatsen?

*How do you perceive the mood at the workplace?*

Vad är ett bra ledarskap enligt dig?

*In your opinion, what is a good leadership?*

Hur uppfattar du din ledarstil? Fördelar/nackdelar?

*How do you perceive your own style of leadership? Advantages and disadvantages?*

Hur uppfattar du relationen till dina underordnade?

*How do you perceive the relation to your subordinates?*

Identifierar du dig med din chef/dina underordnade?

*Do you identify with your manager*

Vad har du för utbildning?

*What kind of education do you hold?*

Hur skiljer sig din utbildning från övriga medarbetares?

*How does your education differ from that of co-workers?*

Har alla dina underordnade samma utbildning eller olika? Hur påverkar det ledarskapet?

*Do all of your subordinates hold the same sort of education, or do they hold different forms?*

*How does this affect the leadership?*



Tror du att din utbildning har påverkat din ledarskapsstil. I så fall hur?

*Do you think that your education has affected your style of leadership? If so, how?*

Tror du att utbildning har någon påverkan på relationen till de underordnade?

*Do you think education affects your relation to subordinates?*