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# Gendered Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations

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## Abstract

Knowledge intensive industries, such as the IT-industry, are known for contributing to the rapid evolution of new technology thanks to their employees. In the constant progress of the industry a flexible leadership style that adds to the creativity is crucial, but is gender possibly a significant implication on the personal leadership style? We found these subjects very interesting when putting them in a relation and decided to examine and question whether there might be a relationship between sex, gender and a leadership style in knowledge intensive organizations. In order to realize the research we collected theoretical material from multiple books and scientific articles on relevant subjects, e.g. sex and gender, leadership styles, management and knowledge intensive industries. We examined the relation between the chosen theories and the empirical research, which was composed of ten interviews with respondents working in leading positions in organizations within the IT-industry in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The results of this research showed that there are no significant differences in leadership between female and male leaders in knowledge intensive organizations that we studied and that there is no connection between a leaders' biological sex and the associated gender when it comes to the chosen leadership style of the respondents interviewed in the research.

We concluded that female and male leaders that were interviewed could adapt a leadership style not necessarily connected to the gender associated to their biological sex. The research revealed that a majority of the respondents have adopted a traditionally more feminine way of leading and that this leadership style is often, but not exclusively, used in the IT-industry.

Keywords: *gender, sex, leadership, leadership styles, feminine/masculine leadership, management, IT-industry, knowledge intensive organizations.*

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction and Background.....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.2 Perspectives .....	7
1.2.1 Social Constructivism .....	7
1.2.2 Performing Gender .....	8
1.3 Sex and Gender .....	9
1.4 Previous Research .....	12
1.5 Objectives and Research Questions .....	13
<b>2. Theoretical Framework and Perspectives.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Definitions .....	14
2.1.1 Leadership and Management.....	14
2.1.2 Leadership Styles .....	15
2.1.3 Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations.....	16
2.2 Gendered Leadership.....	17
2.2.1 Masculine Leadership.....	17
2.2.2 Feminine Leadership .....	18
2.3 Theoretical Summary .....	19
<b>3. Method.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 Methodological Approach .....	20
3.2 Selection and Delimitation .....	21
3.3 Respondents .....	21
3.4 Execution.....	22
3.5 Processing.....	23
3.6 Research Ethical Principles, Credibility and Transparency .....	24
3.7 Methodological Critique.....	25
3.8 Methodological Summary .....	25
<b>4. Empirical Research Presentation.....</b>	<b>27</b>
4.1 Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations.....	27
4.1.1 Leadership Style in Knowledge Intensive Organizations .....	28
4.1.2 The IT-industry and Leadership in Sweden .....	28
4.2 Personal Leadership Style .....	29
4.2.1 Feminine Leadership .....	30
4.2.2 Masculine Leadership.....	30
4.3 Influences on Leadership Style .....	31
4.4 Differences between Female and Male Managers (...)	32
4.5 Leadership Styles, Sex and Gender .....	34
4.5.1 Leadership Style Influenced by Sex .....	34

4.5.2 Leadership Style Influenced by Gender .....	34
4.6 Connection between the Biological Sex and the Associated Gender of a Leader .....	35
4.7 Empirical Summary.....	35
<b>5. Analysis and Discussion .....</b>	<b>37</b>
5.1 Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations.....	37
5.1.1 Personal Leadership Style of the Respondents.....	37
5.2 Differences and Similarities in Leadership between the Sexes.....	38
5.3 Connection between the Biological Sex and the Associated Gender of the Leader .....	39
<b>6. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>46</b>
6.1 Further Research Recommendations.....	49
<b>7. List of References .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>8. Appendix .....</b>	<b>53</b>
8.1 Interview Guide.....	53

## 1. Introduction and Background

While reviewing management course literature we noticed a tendency from researchers to categorize leadership styles by gender instead of naming them by their distinctive traits. A democratic and relation oriented leadership style has been defined as a feminine leadership style and a competitive and analytical leadership style has been defined as masculine leadership style (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre, 2006). We started to wonder whether these generalizations actually correspond with the reality. Is it really the case when it comes to leadership in the business world that a manager would lead accordingly to his or her sex or gender? Even if there might be differences and similarities in leadership styles between leaders, we still found it difficult to accept these generalizations made on the connection to sex and gender of a leader. This made us question the need of gendered adjectives to describe leadership styles i.e. feminine and masculine leadership.

When studying individuals, the question of gender, seen as socially produced differences between the sexes, needs to be included in order to understand what is happening to individuals in their working lives (Billing & Alvesson, 2009).

*“A gender perspective implies analysing the importance, meaning and consequences of what is culturally defined as male or masculine as well as female or feminine ways of thinking (knowing), feeling, valuing and acting.”* (Billing & Alvesson, 2009, p.11)

Even though we want to investigate whether a certain leadership style is connected to a certain sex or not, we are not trying to put the sexes in relation to each other or promote male domination and female victimization. Instead, we want to highlight the way managers lead in knowledge intensive organizations and question the use of the gender adjectives when describing a certain leadership style.

Furthermore, not only leadership styles, but also different fields of work have been associated with a certain gender, e.g. technical fields of work. An early definition of technology from *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and earlier researchers' writings have described technology as men's work. These definitions have reinforced a masculine ideology (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2007). Billing and Alvesson (2009) argue that the workforce can be used more effectively when not constrained by what is seen as natural for the different sexes, and when the ideas about what is considered as men's work and women's work are rejected. Despite this, Billing

and Alvesson (2009) argue that the traditional masculinity has increasingly been questioned during the past decades, simultaneously as women started to question their gender role. For instance, Eriksson-Zetterquist (2007) argues that since the 1990s interest in new technology has grown among women and former stereotypes, concerning gender and the technical field that have traditionally excluded women from working in the technical field, might be reconsidered. The combination of the traditional masculinity being challenged and the women's increased interest in technology lead us to the purpose of the study, which is to investigate whether there is a relationship between sex, gender and leadership style in knowledge intensive organizations. This possible reconstruction of the gender roles made us consider that gendered leadership style in knowledge intensive organizations is interesting to examine further. Since the brain capacity is the key for success in this type of organizations, and not the physical strength that otherwise could potentially have differentiated the two sexes, the chosen industry is in accordance with our gender-neutral approach.

## **1.2 Perspectives**

Since both leadership and gender are words created by its context and can be transformed in every situation where people interact, the research is based on social constructivism and influenced by the radical and socialist perspective on sex and gender originating from feminist studies. Social constructivism is important for the research for understanding the different perceptions of individuals and the radical and socialist perspective need to be included since we are involving the subject of gender and sex. The socialist perspective is crucial for understanding the chosen approach on the concepts of sex and gender since the research aims to examine a possible coherence between them.

### **1.2.1 Social Constructivism**

Social constructivism is a paradigm, i.e. scientific framework that observes society as socially constructed by people who create their own reality (Røvik, 2008). This social scientific perspective advocates that each individual constructs his or her personal view of society and accentuates that we create our own reality. Each person contributes to the social construction of the surroundings and the information and symbols that we perceive are being processed, interpreted and expressed in a particular way by each individual (Røvik, 2008). According to this theory, gender is an example of a social construction, i.e. it consists of socially constructed structures. This means that individuals can define themselves to a certain gender in which they feel affiliation, therefore they do not need to relate to ideas of how other individuals perceive gender. Despite the freedom that individuals have in constructing gender,

it takes a long time to break down or transform these constructions anchored in the society (Czarniawska, 2011).

Kallifatides (2009) presented the idea of a leader being socially or culturally constructed. From this perspective individuals see themselves as leaders or are recognized as leaders in their environment. When a person is mentioned as a leader, he or she behaves according to the narrative that has been created to symbolize what a leader stands for (Kallifatides, 2009).

### **1.2.2 Performing Gender**

We decided to apply two approaches on gender in the research: *the radical* and *the socialist approach* that will be explained later in this section. This was a consequence of the bigger understanding we gained for the complexity of the terms sex and gender throughout the research. Articles presented by West and Zimmerman (1987) and Calás and Smircich (1999) explained the historical development of these terms, which helped us understand how gender can be performed.

In the beginning of the research we distinguished sex and gender as two separate matters, an approach that originates from the radical feminist theory. The radical feminism has intellectual roots in the women's liberation movements of the 1960s. They identified human beings as "*fundamentally embodied sexed beings*" (Calás & Smircich, 1999, p.213) and perceived sex and gender as a social construction that make women subordinated to men. According to radical feminist studies, the male privilege in the society is seen as the norm (Calás & Smircich, 1999). Radical theorists argue that new and developing technologies will make it possible for women to take distance from these historical roles and not be subordinated anymore.

West and Zimmerman (1987) argue in their article *Doing Gender* that in theory we can often perform a separate analysis of these terms, but in practice sex and gender overlap each other. During the data collection we noticed that a majority of the respondents faced difficulties in defining and separating these terms. This ambiguity forced us to examine alternative perspectives on gender. We realized that the chosen radical approach was moving increasingly towards the socialist approach that became more coherent with the research. The social feminist theory emerged in the 1970s and is a mix of previous feminist studies, including the radical perspective. The researchers following the socialist approach believe that



gender is “*processual and socially constituted through several intersections of sex, race, ideology, and experiences of oppression under patriarchy and capitalism (that are distinct systems)*” (Calás & Smircich, 1999, p.213). They argue that gender is more than a socially constructed identity and perceive sex and gender as a system, rather than two separate things (Calás & Smircich, 1999). In order to understand the core of the research we found it important to define these two terms in depth. These will be defined and explained further in the next section.

### **1.3 Sex and Gender**

Gender is perceived, elaborated and changed dependently on the cultural and social context (Billing & Alvesson, 2009). It is practiced in a dynamic matter and since its understanding and performance is constantly changing research plays a crucial role in the future development on how we practice and perceive gender. Since gender is not statically structured but rather emergent and changeable (Billing & Alvesson, 2009), one has the power of changing and reconstructing the perception on gender in our social contexts. For this reason we found it important to investigate whether these fixed frameworks on gender categorized leadership styles, presented in the management literature mentioned earlier, is anticipated in the business world. In order to examine this we will look at the perceptions of leaders within the IT-industry in Gothenburg on the relation between their gender and leadership style.

Often we look at sex and gender as two separate things, where sex is defined as the biological part based on the anatomy, and gender as the psychological, social and cultural construction of it (Järviluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö, 2003). There is an implicit comprehension about the construction of gender as a social and cultural product, and the distinction between sex and gender is “*superficial, a way of making a dichotomy between body and spirit*” (Billing & Alvesson, 1993, p.46). A superficial explanation of these complex terms is that sex regards affiliation and can be seen as the biological part of our belonging. Gender on the other hand is behaviour that corresponds with the sex and refers to everything that can be perceived by others such as appearance, voice and behaviour (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

West and Zimmerman introduced a new perspective and presented these two terms as inseparable. They explained that gender is a product constituted through interaction that is perceived as natural even though it is a socially constructed and argue that “*a women can be seen as unfeminine but not as ‘unfemale’*” (West & Zimmerman 1987, p.134).

In order to gain bigger understanding of these two terms we need to understand what they consist of and what the components are. The terms sex and gender are significantly more complex than only dividing them into the biological and the constructed one (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Sex as a concept can be divided into subcategories such as *sex criteria* and *sex category* in order to be understood. By sex criteria, i.e. biological criterion, they mean the biological and anatomical part of the human body that indicates a certain belonging through our genital parts (West & Zimmerman, 1987). On the other hand, sex category is the social identification of the sex criteria usually hidden from the view off others. Considering this, one can rarely be sure of a person's sex since the sex criteria is not exposed. West & Zimmerman (1987) argue in their article that we in these situations use the socially constructed sex category that is build on assumptions and our senses, i.e. what we see, hear or perceive while interacting with that certain individual. We establish our opinions, make assumptions and categorize individuals based on something that is in fact invisible to us. It is therefore a question of presumption whether someone is a man or a woman based on this ambiguity.

West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that our genitals have little to do with our own identification and affiliation to a certain sex category. They emphasize that an important point is that the sex criteria and the sex category of an individual do not have to be the same e.g. transsexual individual. Despite the existence of alternative sex categories, e.g. transsexuals, there are constraints in the society when categorizing people as members of a sex category, one can perceived as a man *or* as a woman (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Since we cannot see the genitals and base our categorization on that, the category is defined by congruence in staging perceived as credible and behaviour in every situation where an individual is acting appropriate and in according to what is expected (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is expected of a certain sex to know how to behave according to their category. In the society there are hidden manuals and guides that explain to us how we are supposed to behave, argued West and Zimmerman (1987). What is socially expected from each of the categories depends enormously on the geographical place, time and personal situation of each individual (Järviluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö, 2003).

There are many different ways of portraying gender but the sex category can only be demonstrated and confirmed certainly by exposing the sex criteria. West and Zimmerman

(1987) accentuate that we *perform* gender but we do not *create it* therefore we are prisoners of the gender production in the society achieved by interaction. Gender is "an emergent feature of social situations" that functions as a tool for gaining legitimacy in the society (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.126). It is about how we behave according to a certain gender role that is portrayed through biological factors. Gender is therefore not something you *are* but rather something you *do* when you interact with other people in social contexts (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

*"We do become what we practice being."* (Frye quoted by West & Zimmerman 1987, p.146)

Behaviours and performances can be seen as schedules triggered in different situations and contexts, therefore gender can further be seen as a movie role where an individual is expected to act and look in a certain way in order to be recognized as a member of one of the two categories. Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö (2003, p.3) argue that gender should rather be perceived as "*manly and womanly patterns of behavior that an individual adopts independently of their biological sex*". They emphasize that gender is a relative construction that follows a collective structure rather than one of an individual; therefore it can be seen more like a system. Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö (2003) underline that it also be seen as a belief system because of the stereotypical images and opinions we have of women, men and their qualities.

*"Some occasions are organized to routinely display and celebrate behaviours that are conventionally linked to one or the other sex category. On such, occasions, everyone knows his or her place in the interactional scheme of things. If an individual identified as a member of one sex category engages in behaviour usually associated with the other category, this routinization is challenged."* (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.139)

Women face difficulties with so called *role conflicts* where they are supposed to balance the role of being a good mother and wife with the career, all within the boundaries of her gender role (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) explain that this can be particularly challenging when it comes to *allocation* that divides responsibility and rights for the different actions between females and males. This affects the structure of work and division of household labour, e.g. the assumption that the gender role of a female includes housework and childcare is considered as "essential nature". Many roles in the society are marked with gender so we have to emphasize a certain word that modifies the noun to show

an exception to the rule, e.g. *female* leader or *feminine* leadership (West & Zimmerman, 1987). They stress that this is a matter of power and inequality in social relationships.

#### **1.4 Previous Research**

In the initial phase of the research we investigated what had previously been said on the chosen subject and found similar studies that investigated the differences and similarities of female and male managers within other industries than the one chosen in this research. These previous researchers have also examined leaders and their leadership styles, but not in the combination with knowledge intensive organizations and the IT-industry.

By performing a meta-analysis, Eagly and Johnson (1990) presented both similarities and differences between the sexes. They argue that the view, that female and male leaders have distinctive gender stereotypic leadership styles, presented in acknowledged management literature needs to be questioned. However, their study concludes, among other things, that women tend to be slightly more interpersonal, task-oriented and lead in a more democratic manner than the male managers (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Billing and Alvesson (1993) dedicated a chapter in their book *Gender, Managers and Organizations*, where they discuss similarities and differences between female and male managers. They raised the question regarding the differences in the biological sex when discussing the subject of female managers (Billing & Alvesson, 1993). They also argued that the large majority of previous investigations, about whether female managers are different from the male managers, show that they are quite similar (Billing & Alvesson, 1993). The result of the three case studies they performed showed that differences, regarding managerial style, found in their investigation were rather connected to the type of organization than to the gender (Billing & Alvesson, 1993).

Although previous researchers found both the presence and absence of differences between the sexes, Wajcman (1998) found through her research that women and men in senior positions are in most regards indistinguishable. She argues that women and men as groups have more similarities than differences therefore she believes that there is no such thing as a female management style (Wajcman, 1998). Similar thoughts were presented by Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) in their book *Organisation och Organisering*.

These previous researchers mentioned in this section, provided us with inspiration for this research although we decided to investigate the connection between sex, gender and leadership style in another field than these earlier studies.

### **1.5 Objectives and Research Questions**

The objective of the research is to examine if there might be a connection between sex, gender and leadership style of a leader operating in knowledge-intensive organizations.

Based on the chosen theoretical framework we want to study if leaders operating in knowledge intensive organizations are bound by their sex or gender in the chosen leadership style and if they identify themselves with the described gendered leadership styles. In order to investigate this, we will try to examine if they perceive any differences in leadership between the sexes and try to identify the perceived factors that influenced their chosen leadership style. We will also question if an individual of a particular biological sex can practice a leadership style associated with the gender of the opposite sex, i.e. a male leader having a feminine leadership and a female leader having a masculine leadership.

The combination of these thoughts leads us to the following research questions:

- 1. Are there any perceived differences in leadership between female and male leaders in knowledge intensive organizations?*
- 2. Is there possibly a connection between a leader's biological sex and the associated gender when it comes to their leadership style?*

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Perspectives

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*In this chapter we outline the theoretical framing of the thesis. During the research we noticed that many books regarding the chosen subject are older than ten years and are not always updated with the recent research. Therefore we used scientific articles in the same field of studies in order to contribute to a more recent discussion of the chosen subject. This was important since the perspectives are constantly being elaborated and adapted to changes in the society, which are portrayed in the chosen articles.*

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### 2.1 Definitions

In the previous chapter we presented the definitions and background of gender and sex since they are central for the research and further reading. In this part we will explain the relationship between leadership and management and define knowledge intensive organizations and the IT-industry. We believe that these definitions and explanations can facilitate and increase the understanding of the research. We will also outline a couple of the more commonly used leadership styles to emphasize the existence of different leadership styles by using a table presented by Goleman in Harvard Business Review (2000, March-April).

#### 2.1.1 Leadership and Management

*“There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who attempted to define the concept.” (Stodgill, 1974:259, quoted by Western 2008, p. 23)*

Western (2008) points out that leadership is both a noun and a verb and has a double meaning, which is supported by the quote above. Jönsson and Strannegård (2009) illustrated another definition presented by Yukl (2006):

*“Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.”*  
(Yukl, 2006, p.8 quoted by Jönsson & Strannegård, 2009, p.15)

Leadership is often distinguished from management and managing. Traditionally a manager is associated with a formal position/role, devoted to administration and promotes orderliness. Managers have been described as controlling by trying to maintain a status quo. On the contrary, leaders develop the business, inspire the employees and try to motivate them to achieve long-term goals (Jönsson & Strannegård, 2009). When leadership is compared to management, it is presented as more spectacular and desirable (Western, 2008, and Jönsson &

Strannegård, 2009). Although these distinctions are generally accepted, some scholars challenge this separation of these two terms and argue that studying these terms separately might be quite meaningless (Jönsson & Strannegård, 2009). Furthermore these two terms are often well connected, e.g. a leader that only focuses on visions and long-term goals and does not keep the administration in order will probably have difficulties being accepted as a great leader (Jönsson & Strannegård, 2009).

### 2.1.2 Leadership Styles

*“Leadership style refers to the research that focuses on the behavior of leaders—what they do and how they act. Leadership style is the behavior pattern by which a leader interacts with and influences subordinates.”*  
(Daft, 2008, p.789)

The leadership style perspective was a popular research subject within the leadership theory between the end of the 1940s and the end of the 1960s. With this perspective researchers were focusing on leaders’ activities. Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) explain that researchers during this time period argued that a leader would choose a certain leadership style that he or she found most suitable to achieve a desired result. A leader would, e.g. choose to be more caring or more authoritarian if he or she thought that it was necessary for achieving the desired results. Other scholars consider that a leader does not necessarily choose the leadership style and argue instead that the practiced leadership style is affected by the external conditions (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre 2006).

Goleman (2000, March-April) presents in *Harvard Business Review* six leadership styles, originated from different components of emotional intelligence; *self-awareness*, *self-management*, *social awareness* and *social skill* which in turn have specific set of competencies. These leadership styles are presented in the table below and their traits are explained, e.g. “*The leader’s operandi*” meaning *mode of operating* or *way of leading*.

	<b>Coercive</b>	<b>Authoritative</b>	<b>Affiliative</b>	<b>Democratic</b>	<b>Pacesetting</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
<b>The leaders' modus operandi</b>	Demands immediate compliance	Mobilizes people toward a vision	Creates harmony and builds emotional bonds	Forges consensus through participation	Sets high standards for performance	Develops people for the future
<b>The style in a phrase</b>	"Do what I tell you"	"Come with me"	"People come first"	"What do you think?"	"Do as I do, now"	"Try this"
<b>Underlying emotional intelligence competencies</b>	Drive to achieve, initiative, self-control	Self-confidence, empathy, change catalyst	Empathy building relationships, communication	Collaboration, team leadership, communication	Conscientiousness, drive to achieve, initiative	Developing others, empathy, self-awareness
<b>When the style works best</b>	In a crisis, to kick start a turnaround, or with problem employees	When changes require a new vision, or when a clear direction is needed	To heal rifts or to motivate people during stressful circumstances	To build buy-in or consensus, or to get input from valuable employees	To get quick results from a highly motivated and competent team	To help an employee improve performance or develop long-term strengths
<b>Overall impact on climate</b>	Negative	Most strongly positive	Positive	Positive	Negative	Positive

(Goleman, 2000, March-April, p.81-82)

Goleman (2000, March-April) emphasized in his study the advantage of using multiple leadership styles and argued that the more styles a leader performs, the better. He claimed that the best climate and business performance is achieved by leaders who control four or more leadership styles and argued that the most effective leaders can switch between them when it is considered as a necessity (Goleman, 2000, March-April).

### 2.1.3 Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations

Knowledge intensive industries are characterized by activities that are based on intellectual knowledge rather than physical strength or capital assets (Alvesson, Kärreman & Sveningsson, 2009). IT & Telecommunications and service industries, e.g. consulting, are to be recognized as knowledge intensive industries (Alvesson, Kärreman & Sveningsson, 2009).

Information Technology (IT) industry includes manufacturing companies for producing computers and communication products, the telecommunication industry, computer consulting, computer service business etc. (Jörnmark, 2015).

According to Alvesson, Kärreman and Sveningsson (2009) leadership within knowledge intensive organizations is often focused on the everyday activities, e.g. listening to the employees and making small talk. They accentuated that the role of a leader within knowledge intensive organizations is to encourage progress, innovation and learning. This



type of leadership style is often mentioned as a more feminine way of managing (Alvesson, Kärreman & Sveningsson, 2009). Managers in knowledge intensive industries are often unable to fully understand the complexity of some projects. Since competence is seen as a priority, a high level of authority is given to the more qualified employees with expertise knowledge within the organisation (Alvesson, Kärreman & Sveningsson, 2009).

## 2.2 Gendered Leadership

In this section we will discuss what has previously been studied on the connection between gender and leadership. We will present the theories regarding masculine and feminine leadership in order to show previous perceptions and historical development made on gender associated leadership. This is important for the research since gender, seen as socially produced feminine and masculine behavioural patterns, is a key concept for understanding the interaction of individuals in their working life.

### 2.2.1 Masculine Leadership

The norm of human beings is a male, which makes a woman the second sex that is set in relation to a man (Calás & Smircich, 1999). One of the pioneers on this subject was the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. Her book *The Second Sex* examines the image of what is considered as feminine and the construction of how a woman is supposed to be in a male dominated society. Simone de Beauvoir argues that this image is constructed by men but regards women (Järviluoma, Moisala & Vilkkö, 2003).

In early organization theories, women and men were at best perceived as equals, but in some cases the role of women in organizations were seen in the periphery (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre, 2006). Research during the 1960s and the 1970s concluded that female managers seemed to be similar to male managers. However, the research during this time period also concluded that women lacked some attributes due to the biological conditions or incorrect socialization (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre, 2006). Traditionally men have held the management positions, therefore it has been seen as something more masculine.

*“The problem is that the management role has traditionally been related to the category of the white, male, middle class and a part of this managerial practices that have contributed to keeping women in a traditional position on the basis of sex roles, for instance secretary.” (Billing & Alvesson, 1993, p.17)*

Investigations have shown that management has been related to masculine characteristics and therefore a masculine behaviour is considered as successful, which gives an implicit

assumption that women will not fit the role as good (Billing & Alvesson, 1993). Billing and Alvesson (1993) mean that this has affected society's perception of women as managers. For instance, they argue that the employees perceive the behaviour of female managers as aggressive, 'over-domineering' and assertive but conclude that women are still expected to act accordingly to their socially constructed gender role.

*"They should preferably act as 'real women' and this picture is difficult to maintain when they have become managers and show qualifications that women are not expected to have."* (Billing & Alvesson, 1993, p.67)

According to the *Swedish Government Official Report* (SOU 2003:16) female managers are expected to balance the opposing expectations between femininity and professionalism. Female managers who lead as male managers are considered as qualified, but being compared with male managers is not necessarily considered as a good thing. In these cases, female managers can be accused for being masculine by dismissing their femininity. On the contrary, female managers who lead different when compared to male managers may get their gender identity confirmed, but instead they are seen as less qualified than their female counterparts that chose to act as male managers (SOU 2003:16). Consequently, female managers are often compared with the norm, i.e. alike or unlike male managers. The researchers of the *Swedish Government Official Report* (SOU 2003:16) argue that because male and female are often considered as opposites, it contributes to the idea of women managers as inadequate, and they mean that this perception further adds to a built-in contradiction between femininity and leadership (SOU 2003:16).

### **2.2.2 Feminine Leadership**

Female managers still struggle against deeply anchored stereotypes in the society, explained Wajcman (1998) in her book *Managing like a Man*. She argued that many women still adopt leadership styles associated with male management in order to succeed, even though organizations are very enthusiastic about a more feminine style of management (Wajcman, 1998). Despite the fact that female managers are struggling against stereotypes she argued that these are positively re-evaluating. She further emphasized that female managers, with a more consensual style of management, will have an advantage in post-industrial organizations, e.g. knowledge intensive organizations. Qualities described as feminine, e.g. intuitive qualities, and female way of managing with communication and collaborative working will be suitable in this type of organizations (Wajcman, 1998).

In the 1990s corporations were in pursuit for a more normative forms of leading, e.g. focusing on corporate culture, flexibility, decentralizing, service management, innovation and networking. Normative forms of leading combined with feelings and commitment were seen as a less masculine way of leading (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre, 2006). Arguments in favour of differences in the leadership style of the sexes emerged simultaneously in the so-called *women-in-management* literature. Differences in leadership style between the sexes were presented as something ideal, where female leaders were allowed to lead differently. A few of the characteristics that defined masculine leadership were competition, analytical skills and lack of emotion. On the contrary, feminine leadership was described as democratic and oriented towards relations and cooperation (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre, 2006). This diversity in leadership, presented in the women-in-management literature, lead to the reinforcement of the stereotypes instead of focusing on what potential advantages that feminine leadership contributes with.

### **2.3 Theoretical Summary**

In this chapter we unveiled the theoretical framework of the thesis. Initially, we introduced different perspectives that have inspired the research and defined important terms that we have come across. We referred to previous literature that has earlier discussed how gender and sex could potentially affect the leadership. Previous researchers' investigations on differences in leadership between men and women were presented in the introduction chapter, but were frequently used throughout the theory. Finally, in the last part of the theory chapter, we looked into other researcher's conclusions regarding the connection between gender and leadership. Many earlier studies perceived male leaders as the norm and looked at management and leadership as mainly connected to the male. Despite that fact, the feminine leadership has later been re-evaluated when modern organizations demanded more normative forms of managing, which are often seen as more feminine.

In the following chapter, we will explain how we proceeded with the research by describing the chosen method of the thesis and the methodological approach on how we examined a possible connection between gender and leadership style in knowledge intensive organizations.

### 3. Method

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*This chapter presents the method of the thesis and the approach we used for the data collection. We describe the research design, selection and delimitation, execution, processing and credibility of the thesis. In this chapter we will also present the respondents, mention the ethical principles and include the methodological critique.*

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#### 3.1 Methodological Approach

The methodological approach of the thesis is following the subjective and interpretative nature of the research that aims to analyse social settings, therefore we chose qualitative method through interviews. To tie the chosen method to the research question, the aim of this type of data collection is to capture respondents' perception of their reality since this methodological approach does not aim to capture quantifiable answers without giving space to the respondents' opinions.

Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that qualitative research aims to investigate how individuals perceive and interpret their social environment. The authors stress the fact that the context constitutes an essential part of the qualitative research and that people cannot be understood if their environment and their gender isn't taken into account. In order to make a deeper analysis of gender and its connection to the chosen methodological approach we included the book *Gender and Qualitative Methods* by Helmi Järviluoma, Pirkko Moisala and Anni Vilkkö (2003) that claims that qualitative method is a good way of analysing gender related research questions.

We conducted ten interviews with respondents operating in the IT industry; five women and five men in order to create a balance in sex. This was important for the research and the research questions since we wanted to hear opinions and reflections from both sexes in order to make comparisons and conclusions that are applicable for both sexes. The purpose of the interviews was to gain new perspectives on the subject by questioning theories in the literature we studied with reflections collected during interviews to see a possible coherence between theory and empirical material. To make the interviews more efficient and easy to follow we used the methodological book *Interpreting Interviews* written by Mats Alvesson (2011). Since we wanted to hear reflections from individuals and their own perception on leadership styles, interviews were the most natural choice of method for this research. Quantitative research would not have included the opinions that we sought for and other qualitative methods did not capture the unbiased thoughts of each of the respondents.

### 3.2 Selection and Delimitation

The sample-size of ten respondents was a compromise between time, precision and the heterogeneity of the population (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Considering these factors and the amount of workload that the potential respondents have, we had to make a realistic estimation that balanced number of the interviews with the possibility to perform them.

The profile of the respondents had following requirements; leading position with personnel in a small to medium sized company operating in the IT-industry in Gothenburg. We chose to focus on Gothenburg, Sweden, and have a regional approach to increase the availability of the respondents. The selection process was determined by purposive sampling that is a form of non-probability sampling. The aim of this type of sampling was to choose relevant respondents for the research questions in a strategic way (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The starting point of the selection was to examine the location and size of existing organizations that are operating in the IT, consulting and similar knowledge intensive industries in Gothenburg through an online research. We used the database *Retriever* (2015) available through the *Gothenburg University Library* and made an online search at two different websites, AllaBolag.se and FöretagsFakta.se. After choosing appropriate companies according to the profile we contacted the leaders within the company. The selected individuals were contacted through e-mail with a request of participation in the empirical research. We formulated a standard e-mail to facilitate contact and keep a formal level of the communication.

### 3.3 Respondents

The chosen respondents were divided into two groups: one internal and one external. We decided to make this distinction since two out of ten of the respondents do not work within but towards knowledge intensive organization. They are both in managing positions and have wide knowledge about the industry, therefore they are relevant for the research and included in the empirical material. The interview with the male Area & Investment Manager ICT at the non-profit company was conducted in order to learn more about the IT-industry within the region. The second external interview was with a female Consultant Manager in recruitment and staffing organization that informed us about her own leadership but also about the kind of employees the IT-industry is looking for. The remaining eight respondents work in leading positions in organizations within the IT-industry. The sexes of the respondents are balanced in both of the categories.

The information presented in the table below on each of the respondents will be sex, position within the organization, size of the organization (small or medium) and the date of the interview. The information about the company size and number of employees was collected from the database *Retriever* and the categorization of the company size was divided according to definition of small and medium sized enterprises (SME) provided by *EU Legislation* in a Commission Recommendation (1996). All of the respondents work in the IT industry with core business in IT Development or/and IT consultancy.

No.	Sex	Position	The core business of the company	Company size	Date of the interview
1	Male	Area & Investment Manager ICT	Stimulate trade & industry in the region of Gothenburg	Medium	15-04-20
2	Female	Consultant Manager	Recruitment & Staffing in IT and Engineering	Medium	15-04-27
3	Female	CEO	IT Development	Small	15-04-27
4	Male	CEO	Information System Development	Small	15-04-28
5	Male	CEO	IT and Telecommunication Development	Small	15-04-30
6	Female	Senior consultant, former Senior VP Human Resources	Executive IT Consultancy	Small	15-05-04
7	Female	Business Area Manager	Management and IT Consultancy	Medium	15-05-05
8	Male	Consultant and Project Manager (focusing on ITIL)	IT Consultancy	Small	15-05-06
9	Male	Client Manager	IT Consultancy	Medium	15-05-06
10	Female	Regional Manager	Operating and developing network infrastructure	Medium	15-05-07

Table of the respondents, (Stupljanin & Thomke, 2015)

### 3.4 Execution

The method of collecting data was the use of a semi-structured interview form because of its generous approach. In comparison to a structured form, a semi-structured interview allows the respondent to develop their answers with larger flexibility and in the direction that one prefers (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Since the questions are more general and the interview form allows supplementary questions, this provides the respondent with greater opportunity to partly steer the conversation. We covered the themes in a relatively broad and flexible way that encouraged the respondents to give us relevant answers, but the questions still left room for discussion where the respondent had the opportunity to reflect more voluntarily.

We created an interview guide before the execution of the interviews. It was sent to respondents in advance to give them an idea about the design of the interview. The interview guide was written in Swedish and the interviews were held in Swedish. We decided to use the mother tongue of the respondents since that gave them bigger freedom to express their opinions and reflections. We also brought a paper copy of the interview guide to visually facilitate the process and progress of the interview. Considering that the interviews were executed in Swedish, a transcription was not seen as a necessity since the thesis is written in English. Before each interview, the respondents were asked for permission to voice record the interview for private use by using a mobile phone. One of the reasons to record was to enable us to quote and directly translate parts of the interview, which was especially helpful since we chose not to transcribe the interviews because of the language difference between the interviews and the thesis.

The interviews were executed between April 20<sup>th</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup> in 2015. The duration of each interview varied between forty and sixty minutes depending on the respondents' earlier reflection on similar topics. The interview was divided into three different parts; a beginning (introduction), a middle and an end, in accordance to the recommendations from Alvesson (2011). The questions in the interview were formulated in according to the objectives and the research questions. During the introduction of the interview the respondent held a short personal introduction including a description of the current position and the company. The middle part of the interview focused on the respondents perceived leadership style and reflection on the gender as a possible influence. Finally the respondents were given freedom to reflect on and question coherence between leadership style, sex and gender. For more details on the interview questions please see Appendix (8.1).

### **3.5 Processing**

It is a big challenge to explain the clear path of the methodology since qualitative research refers to words and emotions (Bryman & Bell, 2015), but we will try to define the steps in processing of the empirical data. During the interviews one of us was leading the interview while the other on took notes on the computer using the programme Microsoft Word. After each interview we wrote a summary in English based on the notes and the recording. The next step, after executing all of the interviews, was to code topics that were frequently mentioned. We identified common traits that facilitated the analysis of similarities and differences in their

responses. After categorizing the answers in different themes we were able to present the empirical material and compare it to the theory in order to generate an analysis.

### **3.6 Research Ethical Principles, Credibility and Transparency**

In agreement with the respondents, the names, including the name of the organization, will be anonymous. We are aware of that this limited information about the respondents lowers the transparency of the research and can be seen as a critique, but the decision to keep the names anonymous is based on respect and consideration of consequences that the research can have on the individuals that were interviewed. Since the chosen topic is closely related to private questions regarding respondents' perceptions about sex and gender, it was important to build the interview session on trust and reliance in order to receive honest reflections. The qualitative research method focuses on the perceptions of the respondents and not on the estimation of their reality seen from the eyes of the writers, therefore we cannot make a judgment of the coherence between how they perceive the reality and *how it really is* (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Different respondents may have perceived the questions in the interviews differently. For instance the respondents have varied positions within the organization and manage various amounts of employees, which affects their perception of leadership. Another aspect is the type of the organization and their core business. There are differences between product and consultancy based organizations, e.g. managers within consultancy organizations are often managing their employees on distance since they are out on missions at other companies.

We sent the interview-guide to the respondents before the interview in order to give them an opportunity to reflect about the subject, and make the interview session more effective. This could have given the respondents time to think and modify their answers, but simultaneously it helped the respondents to structure their answers and give us relevant information for the research.

Before finishing the thesis, a summary of the personal interview, including the quotes, were sent to each of the respondents that were part of the empirical research in order to give feedback and avoid possible misunderstandings. This is a part of a *respondent validation* and the purpose of this is to increase the credibility by confirming the information collected during the interviews with the results written in the thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2015).



### **3.7 Methodological Critique**

Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that qualitative method is too subjective and that the researchers cannot be objective during their data collection. We were aware of this during the research and do not claim ourselves to be detached from the chosen method, perspectives and theories. Since we make the majority of the decisions concerning the research, the work naturally becomes subjective. Another critique to the chosen methodological approach is that the respondents may have distorted their answers about the perceived leadership style. This might have been prevented by performing observations to test their answers when interacting with employees. Considering that we wanted to hear individual reflections and were constrained by time, single interviews were the clear choice for the data collection.

We conducted semi-structured interviews that may have contributed to the respondents perceiving that we lead them during the interview. Alvesson (2011) argued that respondents may be more restrictive rather than open in their answers when the questions are semi-structured, therefore they adapt their reflections in order to be helpful for the researchers. This can contribute to their answers being more biased. The fact that we recorded the interviews might have affected the respondents' freedom to express their opinions, but to prevent this restrain we ensured them that the recordings are only for our private use during the research.

The results from this report cannot be generalized to a larger population because it is bound by its context. Problem with generalization was prevented through purposive sampling of the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Despite this, the respondents differ in age and position within the organization a variation is created and therefore the results are not representative for the whole population. We considered the homogeneity of the sample and its representation of the population since they are all managers operating in Sweden, but also the heterogeneity because each organization is different.

### **3.8 Methodological Summary**

In this chapter, we presented the chosen method of the thesis used for the data collection. In the beginning of the chapter we introduced and motivated the methodological approach. Later we summarized the selection and delimitation, presented the respondents and described the execution of the interviews. In the final part of the chapter, the ethical principles of the research, the credibility, validity, transparency and the methodological critique of the study were discussed.

We used a qualitative method by collecting data through semi-structured interviews with ten different respondents, five women and five men, working in leading positions for small or medium sized companies in the IT-industry or towards the industry. We wanted to hear their opinions and experiences regarding whether there are *any perceived differences in leadership between female and male leaders in knowledge intensive organizations* and if there is *a possible connection between a leader's biological sex and the associated gender when it comes to their leadership style*.

Between April 20<sup>th</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup> in 2015 interviews were carried out using an interview guide with ten questions that allowed the respondents to reflect and add interesting thoughts to the discussions. The interviews were performed in Swedish and summarized in English, then coded by frequently mentioned topics we found specifically important for the research to present in the empirical chapter. We did not perform transcriptions of the interviews because of the difference between the language used in the thesis and the spoken language during the interviews. In agreement with the respondents, we kept their names, and the names of the companies, anonymous. Before we submitted the thesis, the English summaries of each of the personal interviews were sent to the respondents in order for them to give feedback and avoid possible misunderstandings.

In the following chapter we will present the empirical material, i.e. the results from the interviews, which is processed and categorized into topics convenient for the research.

## 4. Empirical Research Presentation

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*In this chapter we present the collected data from ten interviews with the chosen respondents. Initially we will present respondents' perception of leadership, followed by a description of their personal leadership style and the factors that influenced it. Secondly we present the respondent's reflections regarding sex, gender and leadership. In the final part we summarize the opinions about the perceived connection between sex, gender and leadership.*

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### 4.1 Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations

During the interviews, several of the respondents acknowledged that being a leader in a knowledge intensive organization can be quite challenging and tough. The employees are setting high expectations on their leaders, therefore it is important for a manager in charge to create conditions that motivates and develops the employees.

*"If you put demands on your employees you also have to provide them with the right instruments and resources to meet these demands."* Former Senior Vice President of Human Resources (personal communication, May 4, 2015)

A majority of the respondents made a distinction between being a leader and being an expert by arguing that a leader should focus on improving, motivating and empowering the employees from the periphery.

*"In a modern, knowledge intensive surrounding a manager cannot expect to be the one in the organization with the most knowledge. Instead a good manager should ask his employees 'how can I help you achieve your goal?'"* Area & Investment Manager (personal communication, April 20, 2015)

Most of the respondents considered that by having this approach you will provide your employees with bigger freedom, flexibility and room for personal responsibility.

*"By giving employees responsibilities and trust them doing their job a leader can promote creativity. Because of the high expertise of your employees you have to give them freedom to develop, otherwise they might get bored and leave the organization."* Regional Manager (personal communication, April 30, 2015)

Half of the respondents emphasized the importance of creativity, but many underlined that even creativity is restrained by e.g. financial state of the organization. They argued that being creative can lead to mistakes but that every person within the organization has the integrity to admit when they are wrong and ask for help.

*“Creativity plays a very important part in the IT-industry, therefore you have to use a leadership style that gives employees room to be creative.”* CEO in IT Development (personal communication, April 27,2015)

#### **4.1.1 Leadership Style in Knowledge Intensive Organizations**

A large majority of the respondents considered that their leadership style is not exclusively used within the IT-industry and none of them considered that there is one iconic leadership style for knowledge intensive organizations. They argued that the chosen leadership style has more to do with the personal traits, company size and the group of people that the individual is supposed to lead.

Despite that the majority of the respondents disagreed that their leadership style could only be used in the IT-industry, many of them emphasized certain requirements within the organization in order to perform their leadership style, e.g. that the organization structure needs to be flexible, non-hierarchical, open minded and leave room for creativity. Elaborating on this argument half of the respondents highlighted the importance of coherence between the organization structure and the leader.

A couple of the respondents represented organizations that are value-oriented or have clear core values that permeate the whole organization. They explained that the employees within value oriented/inspired organizations are given wide personal responsibility and that the core values function as a framework that eliminates constant need of control and reporting.

#### **4.1.2 The IT-industry and Leadership in Sweden**

A few of the respondents considered that the IT-industry differs from other industries and a couple of others argued that it is more open and flexible in comparison to other industries the respondents have earlier experienced. The respondents accentuated that this might depend on the fact that the IT-industry is quite young, non-hierarchical and in constant change. Half of the respondents, all being male, argued explicitly that the IT-industry is dominated by men. Despite the male dominance the Project Manager stressed that the industry is in constant change and that sex inequalities will eventually be eliminated. A couple of the other respondents agreed with this and argued that it might depend on country where the organization is operating.

During the discussion about leadership within knowledge intensive organizations more than half of the respondents stressed the connection between leadership and the operating country

of the organization. They accentuated that leadership characterized by the Swedish culture with open communication, consensus approach and transparency. The respondents that supported this argument emphasized a relation between Sweden and abandonment of authority, discipline and control as elements in leadership.

Reflections on socially constructed gender roles arouse during the couple of interviews and were discussed by both sexes. All of the respondents argued that Sweden as the country is unique since it deviates from the traditional gender roles. The female respondents argued that they have advantageous freedom of choice in Sweden and that employers are forced to synchronize with these country specific values.

## 4.2 Personal Leadership Style

Each of the respondents had a distinctive description of their own leadership style, but several qualities were more frequently mentioned. They are presented after importance perceived by the respondents starting from the most significant ones, i.e. the ones with most answers, in order to facilitate their identification and rapidly provide the reader with the key elements in the perceived leadership style of the respondents. Later in the section we present the respondents identification in a certain gender when it comes to their leadership style, i.e. feminine leadership or masculine leadership. These are marked with own headings since they have a central role in the research.

**Motivation** was one of the most important elements of leadership for the respondents. Eight of the respondents argued that motivating, coaching and helping the employees were the key features of their leadership style. Half of them emphasized that knowledge of behavioural science and psychology was essential feature for the motivational leader.

**Communication** was seen as a key feature of the individual leadership styles explained by the respondents. They emphasized the importance of openness, transparency and a constant dialogue with the employees. Business Area Manager summarized this by explaining that “*the keywords for my leadership are openness, transparency, communication, straight dialogue and patency*” (personal communication, May 5, 2015).

Most of the respondents emphasized ***the importance of the employees*** and argued that they represent the core of the company and therefore needs to be valued. In order to make sure that

their employees enjoy their work, the respondents who supported this argument focused on motivation, coaching and feedback in their leadership style. **Responsibility and empowerment** was another feature mentioned by majority of the respondents in different contexts. Most of them accentuated that it is of great importance to involve the employees and give them personal responsibility. A few of the respondents with this argument also emphasized the development of the employees both on a personal and professional level.

Half of the respondents explicitly accentuated the importance of **sharing visions and setting goals** in agreement with the employees and the importance of devotion, presence and energy from the leader within the organization.

*“My ambition is to minimize the amount of hours I am a manager and maximize the number of hours I am a leader.”* CEO in Information System Development organization (personal communication, April 28, 2015)

Other elements mentioned by two or fewer of the respondents while describing their personal leadership style were **self-esteem/inner security, positivity and result orientation**.

#### **4.2.1 Feminine Leadership**

Half of the respondents, two women and three men, identified their leadership as softer and with more feminine features. A few of the respondents placed this more softer way of leading in contrast to what they named as a more masculine way of leading or traditional leadership.

The CEO, operating in the IT and Telecommunication Development, argued that despite the fact that the IT-industry is relatively dominated by men, leaders within the industry are often focused on being supportive and motivating, which is traditionally considered as a more feminine way of leading. This argument was elaborated by the Client Manager that highlighted his use of several attributes considered as feminine in his leadership style even though he is a man. The Regional Manager also defined her leadership as more softer and feminine, but argued that it rather might depend on her caretaking nature and emotional personality than the fact that she is female.

#### **4.2.2 Masculine Leadership**

Six of the respondents, four females and two male, discussed masculine leadership and its applications during the interviews.

*“By tradition leadership is something masculine. Women who have succeeded as leaders and managers have embraced a more masculine way of leading. But things are changing; attributes which traditionally were defined as feminine are gaining importance within organizations”.* Client Manager (personal communication, May 6, 2015)

The Consultant Manager was one of the few women in her class during her university time and explained that she might be using a slightly more masculine leadership style than female managers traditionally do. However, the respondent highlights that she describes marginal differences between herself and the male managers at her workplace.

*“It is probably easier for a woman to imitate a male leadership style than the other way around. The man and the masculine have in general a slighter higher status. It is considered more positive to watch a girl playing football, than a boy dress up like a princess.”* Consultant Manager (personal communication, April 27, 2015)

A few of the female respondents emphasized their ability to adopt, what they named as, a more masculine attributes e.g. result-oriented. The former Senior Vice President of Human Resources explained that in her role as a leader she could be more masculine in certain situations, but that she also could use a more feminine approach in other situations.

The CEO in the Information and System Development argued, after a reflection of his own leadership style, that there is nothing that contradicts a certain sex to adapt a leadership style traditionally connected to the opposite gender, i.e. a women can have a more “masculine” way of leading and vice versa.

### **4.3 Influences on Leadership Style**

Following aspects were identified as major influences on leadership style during the interviews. Eight of the respondents emphasized **personality** as the most important and crucial influence on their leadership style. They argued that a certain leadership style is closely connected to the personality of the individual executing the leadership and believed that a leader should use a leadership style that matches his or her personality, independently of the biological sex. In addition to the influence of personality a couple of the further accentuated the impact of **personal traits and individual factors** on their way of leading e.g. the Business Area Manager defined herself as a *“straightforward, open and caring person that is not afraid of conflicts”* (personal communication, May 5, 2015) and argued that her personal traits in combination with other factors, such as heritage, are reflecting her leadership style.

A majority of the respondents indicated that the chosen leadership style could easily change focus depending on *the situation and status of the company*. Many of them considered that their *environment* was an significant factor that have shaped their leadership style e.g. the Client Manager argued that everything in our surrounding that shapes us as human beings will affect the chosen leadership style.

During the interviews a respondents explicitly expressed that they took into consideration *the group of employees* that they were leading when shaping their leadership style. The CEO of the organization with Information System Development pointed out that it is important that the leadership style suits both the business and the employees.

*Culture and values*, both on a personal and a corporate level, were mentioned by majority of the respondents during the interview and a few of them emphasized it as a major influence on their leadership style.

Other influences on the individual leadership style that were mentioned by two or fewer of the respondents were *childhood, education, heritage, company size, type of organization and earlier experiences*.

#### **4.4 Differences between Female and Male Managers in Knowledge Intensive Organizations**

During the interviews, the respondents were asked if they perceive any differences between female and male managers regarding their way of leading and couple of the respondents indicated following differences.

The Area & Investment Manager described from own experience that female managers want a tighter network within the organization. He argued that women find it more difficult to delegate work but that they in general are better at understanding people. Another characteristic for female managers that he emphasized was passion. He perceived that female managers are in general more passionate at the workplace and about their work.

The CEO operating in IT and Telecommunication Development described some microscopic differences, e.g. that men tend to be a slightly more imprudent or brave and that women are seen as more careful which could possibly affect the way they lead.



The Consultant Manager did not perceive any significant differences between the sexes when it comes to leadership but discussed that female manager as more soft and sensitive if she would generalize.

*“Female managers could easily accommodate employees’ requests (even though it might affect the profitability) because they consider employees’ feelings more than male managers do. Men take profit and margins into calculations more than women do”.* Consultant Manager (personal communication, April 27, 2015)

CEO of the organization operating in the Information System Development claimed that there are biological implications that affects leadership and that socially constructed gender role in our society affect our perception of the sexes. Therefore women have tendency of bigger emotional development because of their maternity nature and biological matters.

The Regional Manager argued that female managers are often forced to become slightly more powerful in order to achieve managing positions.

*“Women are allowed to express feelings while men should hide them since it is perceived as a sign of weakness.”* Regional Manager (personal communication, May 7,2015)

She presented three perceived differences between the sexes concerning leadership; men tend to be more business-oriented than women, men are usually less emotional than women and finally that men can be more abrasive and inappropriate in their behaviour, i.e. they do not always consider other people or their feelings and thoughts.

A distinction that the Client Manager noticed from own experience about female managers he encountered is that they in general might have greater need to withhold control than men have, especially the less experienced female managers. He argued that men are more prone of letting things go and trust other people doing the delegated work. The respondent however emphasized that he has no evidence for this observation.

The remaining respondents perceived marginal or no difference between the sexes in terms of leadership style.

## **4.5 Leadership Style, Sex and Gender**

In the last part of the interviews we moved towards an open discussion where the respondents were free to reflect on the connection between leadership style, sex and gender. A few of the respondents found it hard to separate sex from gender while others argued that there is no need of separating these two. In order to receive sincere answers we decided to let the respondents follow their own definition of these two terms.

### **4.5.1 Leadership Style Influenced by Sex**

Results from the interviews showed that seven out of ten respondents considered that their sex has not affected their leadership style. All of the female respondents that rejected the connection between sex and leadership style, argued that their sex never stopped them from being in leading positions.

The remaining respondents did perceive coherence between sex and leadership style. One of them, the Regional Manager, accented that being a woman has affected the way she leads, even though she perceives herself as a “tomboy”.

### **4.5.2 Leadership Style Influenced by Gender**

Seven of the respondents argued that their gender has not affected their leadership style, a majority of them also rejected the influence of sex explained earlier. During the interviews these respondents frequently returned to the reflection that the individual factors and personality were major influence in a person leadership rather than its biological sex or the associated gender.

The CEO in IT Development considered that different leadership styles are significantly more influenced by personal objectives than by gender and stressed that it has more to do with differences in personalities. The CEO operating in the Information System Development CEO emphasized that both sexes can adapt feminine and masculine ways of leading because it is considered acceptable to lead in different ways in today's society. He distinguished the traditionally masculine leadership as based on managing and the feminine leadership as based on leadership, but argued that they could instead be named as hard and soft leadership.

*“One should not define leadership as masculine or feminine since both sexes can adapt them”* Project Manager (personal communication, May 6, 2015)

The Consultant Manager argued that stereotypes play a significant role in the way a manager is perceived, but she considered that leadership styles are very overlapping, i.e. a male could use a more feminine leadership style as well as a woman could use a more masculine leadership style.

#### **4.6 Connection between the Biological Sex and the Associated Gender of a Leader**

Four of the respondents reflected that there is or might be a connection between the biological sex and the associated gender, i.e. female with feminine and male with masculine, of an individual when it comes to their leadership style. Despite this perceived connection, they had difficulties identifying why it was the case. The respondents argued that this connection might depend on the biological, genetic and historical reasons including gender roles.

*“Well yes, but it is really hard to say exactly what it depends on. We are slaves of our own history. It is easy to fall into a frame.”* CEO Information System Development (personal communication, April 28, 2015)

The CEO operating in the IT and Telecommunication Development referred to the evolution and the many physical differences between the sexes and argued that there should be some mental differences between men and women as well. However, he told us that he has not experienced that women lead in one way, and men lead in another way.

A few other respondents explained that they could identify a certain connection between gender and leadership style, but they argued that it is moving towards a disconnection with time. The remaining respondents argued that there are several other more important factors that affect an individual's personal leadership style and that a person is not bound by the biological sex and the associated gender when choosing the appropriate way of leading.

#### **4.7 Empirical Summary**

In this chapter we presented the summarized answers collected through the ten interviews, organized by the discussed subjects. Initially, the respondents' perceptions and experiences on leadership and leadership styles in knowledge intensive organizations were presented followed by an individual description of the IT-industry and leadership in Sweden. They argued that being a leader in a knowledge intensive organization is challenging and that a leader is often seen in the periphery, constantly trying to motivate and empower the employees by giving them bigger freedom. This described leadership style is not exclusively used in the IT-industry, argued the respondents and instead emphasized that personal traits,

company size and the group of people, affect the leadership style more than the type of industry a manager leads. More than half of the respondents also argued that there is a connection between leadership style and the operating country of the organization.

Later we presented a summary of the most common traits of personal leadership styles mentioned by the respondents and what has influenced their way of leading. The respondents mainly described that they lead by motivating, promoting energy and enthusiasm, communicating, focusing on the employees and making the whole organization strive towards common goals and visions. When describing their own leadership style, half of the respondents portrayed their leadership style as feminine and the other half as masculine. Both categories had mixed sex, i.e. both female and male leaders.

In the final part of the empirical presentation we presented the respondents' observed differences between female and male managers in knowledge intensive organizations and the general discussion regarding leadership styles, sex and gender. A couple of the respondents found that female managers in general need to keep the organization tighter, they have a greater need to withhold control than male managers, are more sensitive and have a tendency of a bigger emotional development. However, a majority the respondents argued that if there are any differences between female and male managers, these differences are marginal and insignificant.

Most of the respondents accentuated personality, personal traits, the situation and status of the company as the most important and crucial influence on their leadership style, rather than sex or gender as main influences in their leadership style. Four of the respondents reflected that there is, or might be a connection between an individual's biological sex and the associated gender in leadership style. However, a majority of the respondents did not recognize a connection between an individual's biological sex and the associated gender when it comes to their leadership style and argued that both sexes could adopt masculine and feminine leadership.

In the following chapter the empirical data will be analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

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*In this chapter we will analyse the empirical material collected from the interviews set in relation to theories presented in the theory chapter. The analysis is based on the research questions, therefore the disposition of the chapter follows the two research questions, which are marked with own headings, and an introduction of leadership in knowledge intensive organisations. The discussion, where we share the reflections and thoughts that emerged during the research, is included in the analysis and will be elaborated further in chapter six.*

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### 5.1 Leadership in Knowledge Intensive Organizations

A broad majority of the respondents acknowledged their leadership style as not exclusively used within the IT-industry based on their own experience within the business and none of them considered that there is one iconic leadership style for knowledge intensive organizations. Despite this fact, they emphasized an absence of hierarchy and explained that a leader is constantly questioned by the employees, expected to work in the periphery, and give the employees a great deal of freedom. This reasoning made by the respondents in this research can be connected to the description of leaders in knowledge intensive organizations presented earlier by Alvesson, Kärreman and Sveningsson (2009). They describe that these leaders are often unable to understand what is really going on in some projects due to the complexity of them, therefore the employees are given a high level of authority.

A few of the respondents emphasized the importance of creativity within knowledge intensive organizations. To boost creativity, some of the respondents mentioned the importance for a leader to within the organization establish an acceptance of being occasionally wrong. Because of the constant progress and the rapid development of the IT-industry, a few of the respondents argued that open and flexible organizations are necessary. Alvesson, Kärreman and Sveningsson (2009) explained that the role of a leader within a knowledge intensive organization is to encourage progress, innovation and learning. These ways of boosting creativity, mentioned by the respondents, can be seen as their way to encourage progress, innovation and learning. Despite this, these answers are bound by its context where the respondents in the research could only speak from their own experience and the organizations they worked for, therefore this may not be applied to all knowledge intensive organizations or the whole IT-industry.

#### 5.1.1 Personal Leadership Style of the Respondents

When the respondents in the research were asked to describe some important features of their own leadership style, they described that they lead by motivating, communicating, focusing on the people of the organization, making people strive towards common goals and visions,

enthusiasm and energy. Motivation was considered as one of the most important attributes for a leader according to the respondents. A majority of the respondents argued that motivating, coaching and helping the employees are the most crucial features of their leadership. These features, e.g. motivation, focusing on the people of the organization and communication can be referred as every day activities, which Alvesson, Kärreman and Sveningsson (2009) describes as something common for leadership within knowledge intensive organizations. All of the mentioned traits are positively connected and desirable for a leader, but since we did not have an opportunity to observe the respondents performing their leadership we cannot for sure state that their answers correspond to their everyday behaviour as leaders.

Another observation from the empirical material worth emphasizing is that half of the respondents clearly identified their leadership as more feminine. A few other respondents did not explicitly describe their leadership as feminine, but mentioned words and phrases, e.g. motivation, communication and focus on the people to describe their leadership style, which Alvesson, Kärreman and Sveningsson (2009) name as a more feminine way of managing. When analysing these results we need to include the fact that the respondents in many cases did not have the knowledge about the gender categorization of leadership style from the theoretical frame used in this research. They instead had their own definitions and perceptions of what was considered as feminine and masculine when it comes to leadership. In order to receive sincere answers for the respondents, we consciously decided not to provide them with the definitions chosen in the research to avoid biased reflections.

## **5.2 Differences and Similarities in Leadership between the Sexes**

When the respondents were asked whether they recognize any possible differences between female and male managers in knowledge intensive organizations they had many different ideas regarding the subject. A few respondents, both female and male ones, found female managers more emotional, understanding, considerate and emotionally developed, in comparison to male managers. Some of the respondents argued that male managers take profit and margins more into account than the female leaders do. A couple of the male respondents considered that female managers find it more difficult, than male managers, to delegate responsibilities. Several descriptions of differences between female and male managers that the respondents concluded, matches the characteristics of feminine and masculine leaders leadership styles Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) describe when referring to the women-in-management literature. Among other characteristics mentioned in women-in-

management literature, Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) give some examples from this literature that correspond with the differences between female and male managers that some of the respondents pointed out, e.g. male leadership style is characterized by analytical skills, male managers are more likely to be perceived as unemotional, while female managers are more characterized by relations and cooperation. It is important to stress that these results are based on the perceptions of the respondents interviewed in this research and their organizations. It is only applicable onto this particular context and are not be generalized to all knowledge intensive organizations or the whole IT-industry.

### **5.3 Connection between the Biological Sex and the Associated Gender of the Leader**

The socially constructed gender roles are perceived as natural, but by deviating from them we question their existence. The respondents reflected on this subject and stated that the current gender roles would eventually be reevaluated because we constantly gain bigger understanding regarding their limitations for individuals that are expected to behave in a certain way.

During the research we realized the complexity of the terms sex, gender and leadership style. They were in many situations during the interviews inseparable but we needed to divide them in different components in order to understand respondents' gender and sex identification in their role as leaders in knowledge intensive organisations. We noticed that many of the respondents had not reflected on their sex or gender since many had difficulties defining and separating the two of them. During the interviews we allowed them to reflect freely and independently of the "correct" connotation of the terms since we wanted to hear their perceptions of it. A problem with this approach was that we had to make an interpretation of their answers in order to apply it to the research question. In couple of the cases the material received during the interviews could not be used because of the misinterpretation of the terms. In order to minimize the risk of misinterpretation we explained for the respondents that the biological sex regarded the sex category, i.e. female and male, while gender was referring to feminine and masculine roles. These explanations were presented without further biasing the respondents with the different perspectives of the terms, i.e. radical and social approach, mentioned in the introduction of the research.

#### **Personality**

In the theory chapter Daft (2008) and Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö (2003) argued that gender and leadership style are constructed terms that depend on the individual performing

each of them. This was confirmed by eight out of ten of the respondents that argued that their personality reflects their leadership style rather than gender, and has bigger impact on the choice and implementation of a certain leadership style. Despite the fact that the leadership style is mainly influenced by personality, as argued by majority of the respondents, an individual does not always have a full control of his or hers leadership style. Both the researchers (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre 2006) and the respondents from the research accentuated the impact of external conditions, e.g. the operating country. It is necessary to stress that personality was seen as the most important feature in this particular composition of respondents and is not representable for all leaders in knowledge intensive organizations because the answers received from the interviews are subjective.

### **Influence of the Sex and/or Gender**

During the interviews, none of the respondents indicated that either sex or gender influenced their leadership style. Despite this, a few of the respondents considered that their sex and gender affected their leadership when we discussed the subject from a gender perspective. We noticed that the female respondents, that did not perceive any connection between these, had a tendency to take a stronger statement since they clearly pointed out the absence of this connection. One reason for this might be that the female leaders did not want to be bound or delimited by their sex or the stereotypical gender roles mentioned by Calás and Smircich (1999) and Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006). They describe the perception where a woman often is set in relation to a man and seen in the periphery. These female respondents wanted to argue against this stereotyped comprehension by emphasizing power to break free from these norms place women in a disadvantageous position.

Several of the respondents, that were not affected by their sex or gender in their leadership, discussed that there might be some microscopic but insignificant connection and emphasized instead the influence of other factors, e.g. personality.

### **Possible Connection between the Biological Sex and the Associated Gender**

During a reflection on a possible connection between a leader's biological sex and the associated gender when it comes to their leadership style, the male respondents referred more to the biological causes while female respondents indicated that it has more to do with historical gender roles. We noticed a tendency that the male respondents wanted to justify this with more natural reasons by referring to physical differences between the sexes which was in



according to the theories presented by Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006), while female respondents argued that it is rather a matter of socially constructed and stereotypical gender roles. The answers we received from the women in the research were coherent with the discussion by West and Zimmerman (1987) that problematize the socially constructed incongruence in the different roles of a woman, e.g. being a mother and also a manager.

### **The Division of Household Labour**

As West and Zimmerman (1987) explained in their article the division of household labour is unequal and females automatically assume bigger responsibility since household work goes hand in hand with the female gender. This issue is discussed by several of the respondents, of both sexes, that argue the empowerment of women through these inequalities. The female respondents stressed that women set high requirements on their own performance and roles, e.g. being an extraordinary mother, wife and leader at the same time. One of the female respondents reflected on the downplay of femininity in practising her leadership, which was the same topic discussed in the article *Doing Gender* (1987) where the authors accentuate that a female can be less feminine but never become “unfemale”. The male respondents argued that femininity could help females become even better leaders because of their emotional development and ability to multitask. However, female leaders are still perceived as an exception to the rule and this attitude was both perceived by the respondents and presented by earlier researchers (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The respondents in this research do contradict the chosen theories in some matters since the female leaders did not perceive these limitations in their gender roles and were able to balance their private and professional life. Despite this, a few of the respondents emphasized that it might depend on the fact that Sweden as a country is questioning and deviating from these traditional gender roles.

### **History**

During earlier periods, leaders did not have a choice and had to lead in accordance to his/hers sex and the associated gender. Today a manager has the freedom of choosing a leadership style that fits the personality independently of the gender. A few of the respondents argued that historically the leaders were not allowed to adopt leadership styles associated with the opposite sex and since the male leadership was the norm, as argued by Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006), many female leaders assumed that the masculine way of leading was the only way to achieve leading positions. Some of the respondents argued that it is easier for females to adapt a more masculine way of leading. They consider that it happened more

frequently and that it might be more acceptable than the other way around. However, the research showed that this is not the case for the interviewed leaders since all of the male respondents in the research stated that they have a more feminine way of leading. Characteristics that the male respondents mentioned as key features in their leadership were support, motivation, democracy and focus on the employee, which is traditionally connected to feminine leadership style and therefore also to female leaders (Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling & Styhre, 2006). A few of the respondents emphasised their pride in having a more supporting and soft leadership even though it might be perceived as a female feature. On the other hand, a majority of the female respondents argued that they have, what usually is perceived as, a more masculine way of leading. Another female respondent explained that she was able to transcend between the feminine and masculine way of leading depending on the situation and only one of the female respondents clearly stated that she has a feminine leadership style.

These results might be connected with the fact that majority of the respondents argued that their leadership is influenced by their personalities. This indicates that their leadership style could possibly be more affected by the feminine or masculine nature of their personality than by their sex.

### **Feminine Leadership**

Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) argued that normative forms of leading combined with feelings and commitment were perceived as more feminine way of leading. They also accentuated that this leadership style became increasingly desirable in recent decades. This corresponds to the results from the empirical material where a majority, both female and male, of the leaders interviewed for the research described their leadership as more feminine. This made us question whether this is a matter of gender or just the fact that the feminine way of leading is more desirable at the moment and therefore sought after by leaders independently of their biological sex. Despite that a majority of the respondents adopted a feminine way of leading, many of them mentioned that masculine values still dominate. They also emphasized that the masculine leadership is becoming softer and moving more towards attributes considered as feminine. One of the respondents mentioned that the masculine way of leading is more connected to management, while the feminine one is focusing more on leadership which we can see in theories presented by Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006). This perception might be connected to the organizational

environment within knowledge intensive organizations where authoritative and dominant leader is not suited since these organizations focus on knowledge and encourage creativity. Many of the respondents explained that the corporate culture is build on equality and understanding where managers are more expected to lead the employees by motivation rather than managing and controlling how they perform their work.

### **Females practising Masculine Leadership**

A couple of the respondents argued that female leaders are expected to practice masculine leadership in order to gain legitimacy since it is seen as the norm. Billing and Alvesson (1993) argue that these historical frameworks in managerial practices keep women in traditional positions based on the sex roles. West and Zimmerman (1987) elaborate this by arguing that female leaders are not perceived as normative, therefore we have this need of emphasizing that something connected to management of leadership is feminine because otherwise it is assumed to be masculine. The respondents, both female and male, confirmed this argument but hoped that this perception will be changed in the future. Our need of categorizing people, as argued by West and Zimmerman (1987), creates difficulties in perceiving female leaders practicing masculine leadership even if that is considered as the norm that both sexes need to accustom to. If females differentiate their leadership from the masculine one that might confirm their gender identity, hence the feminine adjective that characterizes leadership stereotypically performed by a female leader. However, a majority of the respondents in the research rejected these theories with the argument that the personality forms the leadership style practised by an individual independently of the expectations with respect to sex or gender. Wajcman (1998) argued that many women still adopt more masculine leadership styles in order to succeed, which is also mentioned in our research where the description of the personal leadership style provided by three of the female respondents were more consistent with the masculine way of leading according to characteristics mentioned by Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006). It is important to emphasize that they all argued that their leadership style is more connected to their personality then on their belief that it is the recipe for success. Despite this, we need to accentuate that the respondents might have modified these answers as an excuse rather than admitting that their choice of performing masculine leadership is a deliberate decision or a socially constructed requirement.

### **Both Sexes practising Feminine and Masculine Leadership Style**

A few of the respondents emphasized that both sexes could adapt both feminine and masculine way of leading because of the increased tolerance in the society, therefore it is not required to define leadership by gender since the respondents argued that both sexes could use them. West and Zimmerman (1987) confirm this by emphasizing that gender is something we perform not something we are, therefore we believe there should not be any limitations for the sexes to practice the leadership associated with the opposite sex. We reflected that gendered leadership names could be rooted in stereotypical personal traits of the sexes, e.g. females being emotional and male being dominant but during the empirical research we noticed that it is not habitual that female leaders have these traits, neither privately nor in their leadership. Our reflection, inspired by West and Zimmerman (1987), assumes that since gender is a role that is being performed it should be easy to adopt another role, including the one of the opposite sex i.e. a female leader can technically behave like a male leader but that is not what is expected of her. As Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö (2003) argue that we adopt the female and male behavioural patterns independently of the biological sex, which is also confirmed by the respondents. None of the respondents had a clearly masculine leadership style but rather preferred to execute behaviour socially connected to a more feminine leadership. This might depend on the industry and the country where the leaders interviewed in this research operate but we can only speculate on possible explanations for this phenomenon. If we conducted the same research in another industry or country, the results might be different.

### **Situation specific leadership**

Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) argued that a leader chooses a leadership style that he or she finds most suitable for a specific situation and for achieving a desired result. A couple of the respondents emphasized that their leadership is adapted to different situations, goals and vision depending on what the leader needs to achieve. This is in accordance with Goleman (2000, March-April) who argues that different challenges require different leadership and that a leader should combine several types of leadership styles in order to achieve best results and solutions. A couple of the respondents argued that their leadership was a balance between profit and developing and supporting the employees. Jönsson and Strannegård (2009) also argued that the roles of a result oriented manager and motivation-oriented leader are well connected and complementary to each other.

To sum up the analysis, a majority of the respondents acknowledged their leadership style as not exclusively used within the IT-industry and none of them had noticed such a thing as one iconic leadership style for knowledge intensive organizations. When describing leaders in the IT-industry and their own leadership style many of them mentioned traits that are coherent with the leadership style in knowledge intensive organisations described by Alvesson, Kärreman and Sveningsson (2009). There were few common denominators when the respondents were to recognize possible differences and similarities between female and male managers in knowledge intensive organizations. A few of the respondents described female leaders as more emotional and considerate than men, and find male leaders taking profit and margins more into consideration than women. The stereotyped descriptions in the women-in-management literature mentioned by Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) were confirmed by these observations. In the second part of the analysis, devoted to connection between a leader's biological sex and the associated gender, the respondents argued that a possible connection between these might depend on the biological, genetic and historical reasons including gender roles, which was also mentioned by the theorist, e.g. Billing and Alvesson (1993), Eriksson-Zetterquist, Kalling and Styhre (2006) and West and Zimmerman (1987). Despite this, the respondents argued that there are several other more important factors that affect an individual's personal leadership style and that a person is not bound by the biological sex and the associated gender when choosing the appropriate way of leading.

We want to stress the fact that the analysed empirical material is compelled by subjective answers and perceptions of the ten respondents interviewed in this research. Their opinions can only be understood in its context and cannot necessarily be applied to other situations. Despite our ambition to remain objective throughout the research, the interpretation of the collected data is subjectively analysed and restrained by the limited number of the respondents. Another critique that needs to be taken into consideration is that the respondents had the freedom to talk about their leadership style freely and we did not have time to make an observation in order to confirm their description in reality.

In the following chapter we will present conclusions about the main arguments based on the analysis. We will try to summarize the research by looking back at the introduction and the purpose of the study in order to see what possible conclusions can be made from the earlier presented chapters.

## 6. Conclusion

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*In the final chapter we conclude the analysed results from the theory and empirical material, combined with personal reflections and thoughts. We will highlight the main arguments and conclusions that emerged throughout the research in order to facilitate an overview.*

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As presented in the empirical chapter, the respondents' leadership styles were more connected to their personality and personal traits than to their biological sex. It was not until we questioned the respondents regarding their perception of the leadership style belonging to the opposite sex that they brought to attention some differences, e.g. female leaders were perceived as more emotional and male leaders as more analytical. However, the respondents in the research that discussed any differences between the sexes underlined that these were marginal. Despite this, we can only make conclusions based on the organizations represented by the respondents interviewed in this research. Previous researchers, e.g. Billing & Alvesson, (1993) and Wajcman (1998), have presented similar conclusions in their studies where they demonstrated that female and male managers in other industries have fairly similar ways of leading.

On the contrary, there were many similarities in the way that the respondents performed their leadership, especially regarding the use of motivation and communication. A majority of the respondents mentioned normative forms of leading, e.g. focusing on feelings, commitment, motivation and communication. Despite that most of the respondents did not perceive such a thing as one iconic leadership style for knowledge intensive organizations, many of them mentioned same or similar features, e.g. the absence of hierarchy and the periphery role a leader has in these organizations. According to this observation we can conclude that the respondents in this research practiced a similar leadership style and that there might be a more commonly used leadership style in these knowledge intensive organizations. It is important to stress that this observation is not representable for all organizations of this kind, therefore we can only draw conclusions based on the ten knowledge intensive organizations represented by the respondents in this research.

Another interesting observation we made during the interviews was that many of the differences that the respondents referred to originated from their beliefs and preconceptions, not from actual observations. During the interviews, a majority of the respondents predominantly spent more time describing the traits in leadership of the opposite sex, instead

of focusing on their own sex. They reflected on gender roles and socially constructed perceptions associated with a certain sex. The respondents in the research described the possible differences by using stereotypes but they realized that these statements were unfounded since they identified some traits in their own personality that stereotypically belongs to the opposite sex. A majority of the statements from the respondents were biased by stereotypes and not on perceptions founded on concrete occurrences, therefore we cannot base any wider conclusions on these observations.

As presented in the introduction, we had a radical approach originating from the feminist studies (separating sex and gender) in the beginning of the research that formed our research questions but had to complement it with a social approach (sex and gender perceived as inseparable) during the data collection. We noticed that the respondents had difficulties distinguishing sex from gender while talking about their leadership style. Despite that the respondents tried to separate sex from gender, these terms became inseparable during the interviews. Since the respondents mixed these terms it was hard to make a clear distinction of their perception regarding their sex and their gender. This might have affected the way we perceived their answers since the subject can be ambiguous if the terms are not clearly explained.

Leadership and gender refer to the same phenomenon that is created through interaction and bound by socially constructed frameworks that are not natural. These frameworks can therefore be reevaluated with time and new perspectives, including bigger understanding for individuals. Since both terms are constructed through interaction with other people, it is considerable to play with the thought that both the creation and performance of gender and leadership style is happening simultaneously. If that is the case, how can we separate what is an individual's gender from their leadership style? If gender and leadership style are performed at the same time then every leadership style, independently of the associated traits, performed by a woman could be considered as feminine and vice versa. Both gender and leadership are performed and built on behavioural patterns of an individual that can be changed and adopted depending on the situation. If they both are relative and vary between situations, here the only framework is set by social constructions, we consider that there is nothing natural that claims that an individual cannot transcend between these. By this we refer to the possibility for a woman to behave masculine or feminine in her leadership but within the frames of her associated gender, i.e. a woman can still be feminine while performing

masculine leadership. The same argument applies to the male leaders, which was also confirmed by the empirical material in this research where all of the male respondents performed a more feminine way of leading. This confirmation of theory is restricted to the respondents in this research and cannot be applied to a bigger context without further research. We noticed that it might be more relevant to observe the differences within a sex category, i.e. female and male, rather than comparing the sexes when studying gendered leadership in knowledge intensive organizations. The results from this research showed that both the female and male respondents we interviewed had various leadership styles that were more connected to their personalities than their sex or gender, therefore their leadership style was not bound by these two factors.

During the study many of the respondents emphasized the emergence of feminine attributes in leadership style in their organizations and argued that this might be the case for the whole IT-industry. All male respondents and a few of the female respondents performed what earlier researchers have defined as a more feminine leadership. Considering this observation we noticed that there was no need of defining a certain leadership style by a certain gender since it, in this research, is more frequently used by the opposite sex. The respondents argued that there are several other more important factors that affect an individual's personal leadership style and that a person is not bound by the biological sex and the associated gender when choosing the appropriate way of leading. Some traits that we noticed in the results from the interviews showed that we not necessarily have to follow the stereotyped gender traits when it comes to the leadership style, therefore we can conclude that the respondents in this research felt no need of defining leadership styles by gender. Despite this, we can only base our conclusion on the perceptions of the chosen respondents since this categorisation of leadership based on gender might be needed in other contexts.

The respondents that we interviewed were able to practice a leadership style associated with the opposite gender but this might depend on other factors, such as the nature of the IT-industry, the corporate culture of the organizations represented by the chosen respondents or their own personalities. These results from the research contradict the theories presented by earlier researchers from management course literature, who supported that leadership should be defined and divided by gender.



It is important to accentuate that we cannot broadcast a clear connection between gender and leadership style performed by a leader in a knowledge intensive organisation since our chosen method is not based on statistics. Based on the results from the conducted research we can only highlight, without making any conclusions, the indication that there is no connection between gender and leadership style in knowledge intensive organizations and that a leader within these organisations is not restricted by its sex or gender when performing a certain leadership.

### **6.1 Further Research Recommendations**

During the research we noticed a lack of coherence between subjects that are closely related. For instance, the field of gender and leadership is quite unexplored and leaves room for further research. It would be of interest to execute a similar but deeper research with additional number of interviews, to examine if the result will be the same with a bigger population observed. During the research we identified that there is a need to involve psychology when researching about individuals and their own perceptions in order to gain bigger understanding of their constructed world. The focus of the research was the IT-industry but there are many other knowledge intensive industries to be examined, e.g. accounting, consultancy and labour recruitment.

A few of the respondents discussed the importance of group dynamics and matching personalities. Since many organizations are using different personality tests, in order to identify the best possible combination of employees, it could be something to look more into. It is possible to map different qualities possessed by leaders with the current empirical research by looking at their leadership style. With this information it could be of interest to create a connection to psychology and different personality test to identify what type of personality suits best for a leader in the IT-industry. This would need bigger research but the data collection could be performed with a quantitative method in order to gather more information.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Interview Guide

#### → **Introduktion**

Hur lång tid har du jobbat inom organisationen? Hur har din yrkesutveckling sett ut?

Vad är företagets kärnverksamhet? Vilka tjänster erbjuder ni utöver det?

Vilka är dina arbetsuppgifter?

#### → **Ledarskapsstilen inom organisationen**

Hur skulle du beskriva ditt ledarskap? Ge några exempel på hur du utövar ditt ledarskap.

Hur upplever du rollen som ledare i en kunskapsintensiv organisation?

Vilka faktorer har påverkat din ledarskapsstil?

#### → **Ledarskap ur ett genusperspektiv**

Speglar ditt kön ditt sätt att leda?

Upplever du att det finns några likheter/skillnader i ditt sätt att leda med en ledarskapsstil som en kollega av motsatt kön har?

Tror du att ditt kön påverkar ditt sätt att leda? Om ja, på vilket sätt?

#### → **Avslutande fråga**

Tror du att det i allmänhet finns en koppling mellan kön och ledarskapsstil?