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MSc in Business and Economics, Specialization in Management

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## If I Were A Boy

A qualitative case study about the barriers to female career advancement and how these can be mitigated by leadership development programs

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*Women have been entering organizations at about the same rate as men, yet remain dramatically underrepresented at senior levels. Considering that this is the reality of the labor market, while in fact companies with a larger share of females outperform those with a smaller share, consequently calls for an organizational reaction. This study will therefore empirically confirm theoretically identified barriers women are experiencing today in their path towards leadership positions to find out if leadership development programs could be a potential way of mitigating the confirmed barriers. This by shaping its participants to become autonomous thinkers through transformative learning. A case company study was conducted with Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB through which an interview study was conducted with 16 females holding leadership positions at different organizations throughout Sweden. The findings from the study imply that women experience barriers to their career advancement and in order to mitigate the barriers, leadership development program content is considered to be a means of delivering the awareness necessary to become an autonomous thinker through transformative learning. The research resulted in the finding of a new barrier, referred to as lack of female support, and the discarding of four of the leadership development program content elements and their ability to mitigate the confirmed barriers. Finally the remaining content elements were not found to mitigate two of the identified barriers, referred to as pipeline and adverse selection. The results enhance the knowledge about what content elements can be considered valuable for leadership development program providers in order to mitigate these barriers. It further contributes to the practitioners offering leadership development programs in terms of support and inspiration on the elements to include when designing a program.*

KEYWORDS: Gender, Barriers to female career advancement, Leadership development program, Autonomous thinkers, Transformative learning

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### Authors

Emelie Wendelstam 22090

Therese Åbb 50206

### Thesis Supervisor

Ingalill Holmberg

### Presentation

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### Thesis Coordinator

Karin Fernler

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Concept	Description of concept
<b>Autonomous thinking</b>	The understanding, skill and disposition necessary to make individuals more critically reflective of their own assumptions and beliefs (Mezirow 1997)
<b>Awareness</b>	The state or condition of being aware, having knowledge, consciousness
<b>Barriers</b>	Something that restrains or obstructs progress or access
<b>Gender equality</b>	It is a matter of ensuring that the best suited individuals, in possession of the greatest skill and fit with the role in question are reaching their full potential, rather than being limited by gender among other aspects (Hewlett, Luce 2005; Zahidi, Ibarra 2010)
<b>Hypermasculine demeanor</b>	A psychological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior
<b>Leader development</b>	Improving human capital, e.g. individual capabilities such as those related to self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation (McCauley 2000). Hereby referred to as “leadership development”
<b>Leadership development program</b>	Teaching of leadership qualities to an individual who may or may not use the learned skills in a leadership position. Hereby referred to as “LDP”
<b>Leadership development program addressing gender inequality</b>	In the context of this thesis, the concept of “addressing” means that the leadership development program is actively including content targeted at raising awareness regarding gender inequality in order to counter it
<b>Mitigate</b>	To lessen in force or intensity, to become milder, lessen in severity
<b>Second-generation gender bias</b>	Society’s cultural beliefs about gender, in combination with prevailing structures at workplaces, practices in everyday life and interaction patterns which continue to favor men over women (Calás, Smircich 2009; Ely, Meyerson 2000; Kolb, McGinn 2009; Sturm 2001)
<b>Transformative learning</b>	To expand an individual's frame of reference through critical reflection upon the assumptions, values and habits that ultimately triggers our actions (Mezirow 1997)

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Equality and its progression in society have rendered researchers questioning its prevailing state and future progress potential. Some consider men and women to already be competing under the same conditions (Cockburn 1991), while other researchers disagree and consider equality to be a future result achieved through generational succession (Wahl 2003). Consequently, since some may not consider the two genders unequal in society at large, the issue of equality becomes all the more unnoticeable in the context of organizations and society while also generating reluctance to take steps in the direction towards more equal conditions for men and women (Wahl 2003; Cockburn 1991). This becomes evident when for at least a quarter of a century women have been entering the professional managerial ranks (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011; SCB 2014) at about the same rate as men, yet remain dramatically underrepresented at senior levels (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011; Noland, Moran et al. 2016). Women currently constitute four percent of the CEO positions at S&P 500 companies (Catalyst 2016a) and remain a minority throughout the organizational hierarchies (Catalyst 2016b). One reason is that fewer women hold positions leading to senior levels (McKinsey & Company, *Lean In* 2015) due to both internal and external barriers. Considering that this is the reality of the labor market, while in fact companies with a larger share of females outperform those with a smaller share (DDI 2015) consequently calls for an organizational reaction. The barriers women experience and how they potentially could be addressed becomes of high importance in order to strive towards gender equality.

In order to address inequality, autonomous thinking becomes all the more important, implying critical reflection of assumptions and frames of references (Mezirow 1997). Autonomous thinking is achieved through transformative learning, which is a means of shaping the individual's view of the world to re-create structures of assumptions used to understand experiences. By achieving a higher level of awareness regarding inequality, one could overcome the structures, which also cause selectivity and delimitations in perception and indirectly determine our actions (Mezirow 1991; 1995; 1996; Cranton 1994; 1996).

The most commonly used method for organizations to develop leaders is formal training, which is applied by 81 percent of the organizations researched by DDI (2015). Leadership development programs, which allow leaders to build knowledge and skills as well as confidence in the long run (DDI 2015; Boatman, Wellins et al. 2011), could therefore be the right forum to carry out the development of autonomous thinkers. To ultimately achieve autonomous thinking participants, the leadership development program must fall within the frames of aforementioned notion of transformative learning to create a higher level of

awareness among its participants (Mezirow 1997). Ely, Ibarra et al. (2011) further highlight the importance of connecting leadership development to the invisible barriers to women's career advancement, ultimately calling for a new developmental agenda for women in leadership roles, and that such an agenda is timely. To conclude, one could presume that leadership development accompanied by elements emphasizing the importance of gender equality would imply a better firm performance.

## 1.1 THE SOCIAL CREATION OF A LEADER

Neuroscientist professor Gina Rippon claims that male and female brains differ due to relentless gender stereotyping through environmental factors, mainly cultural stimuli. Although men and women are born equal, women's brains may therefore become trained in certain tasks due to society's expectations, making certain parts of the brain more frequently used (Knapton 2014), hence men and women are imprinted differently. Tajfel and Turner (1979) states that people tend to make sense of their world, including other people, by allocating individuals into social categories such as class, age and gender (Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011). Individuals are therefore expected to possess certain characteristics depending on what social category they are associated with. Consequently, an individual's sense of self-image or identity is formed by their assigned memberships of these groups (Sveningsson, Larsson 2006). Hence gender is a construction appearing in a social and cultural context (Franzén, Höök et al. 1994) and a large share of the research conducted has not been able to support that the genders are different on an aggregated level (Kovalainen 1990; Bartol 1978; Butterfield, Powell 1981).

Further, research has shown that leaders achieve their skills partly through genetic conditions, but mostly through effort and determination (Northwestern 2015). A study from De Neve, Mikhaylov et al. (2013) approximated the weight of the two components in their contribution to leaders and arrived at accounting 24 percent to genetics and 76 percent to learning. Genetics may therefore provide people with a head start on building their leadership potential. According to Rooke, Torbert (2005) *the way* leaders are made becomes of high importance for organizational change.

## 1.2 FIRM PERFORMANCE THROUGH LEADERSHIP

One of the main contributing factors to a company's profitability is proper leadership (Hernez-Broome, Hughes 2004; Yukl 2013; Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011). A study conducted by Deloitte (2012) discovered that a key factor of the performance was a firm's senior leadership team, potentially accounting for an added 15 percent in the company value. This is in accord with Horne, Stedman Jones (2001) who concluded the existence of a relationship between systematic implementation of leadership development and

strong organizations as well as performance (Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011).

The potential strategic advantage gained through proper leadership is considered to be an intangible asset, which must be cultivated to achieve a valuable source of competitive edge (Jackson, Parry 2011). In 2014 the US spending on corporate training was up by 15 percent, implying the highest growth rate in seven years, resulting in an investment of over \$130 billion globally. It seems as these investments do pay off; companies spending significantly more on training also tend to perform better than those who do not (Bersin 2014).

A recent global study by Noland, Moran et al. (2016) found that companies which increased their share of women in senior leadership positions from 0 to 30 percent experienced a one-percentage-point increase in net margin, translating to a 15 percent increase in profitability for a typical firm. Considering that female CEOs do not systematically underperform their male counterparts (Noland, Moran et al. 2016) and that there is no significant difference between men and women in regards to leadership skills or ability to handle management and business challenges (DDI 2015), there is thus a high importance of creating a pipeline for female managers (Noland, Moran et al. 2016).

### 1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE

Previous sections present numerous factors, fortifying why the chosen research topic should add pertinent and operative knowledge. Gender equality in organizational leadership is becoming progressively important for the profitability and future success of companies in an increasingly competitive global environment. By first empirically confirming the theoretically identified barriers women are experiencing today in their path towards leadership positions, this thesis aims to find out if leadership development programs could be a potential way of mitigating the confirmed barriers by shaping its participants to become autonomous thinkers through transformative learning (see Figure 1).

### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The aforementioned purpose to confirm the barriers, as experienced by women, to female career advancement and how leadership development programs can mitigate these barriers, will be guided by the research question:

*Which are the barriers women experience to female career advancement and how can these be mitigated by leadership development programs in order to ultimately contribute to increasing the amount of women in leadership positions?*

### 1.5 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

This thesis builds on existing theories and research on barriers that women experience when climbing the corporate ladder, as well as LDP. By bridging theory between leadership development programs and their content, with the experienced barriers to female career advancement, this thesis aspires to confirm the barriers to female career advancement and discover how LDPs can mitigate them with the possibility to have an impact on the individual leader, the organization and the society as a whole in the long run by achieving greater gender balance. As such, the thesis will be able to further develop and add to the insufficient literature on dimensions of LDP content theory in the context of gender roles in organizational settings. Given the fact that the share of women in leadership positions remains low, despite research stating the potential benefits an organization can draw from a more gender balanced leadership, the researchers of this thesis thus find the empirical relevance of this issue to be high and important to study from a societal perspective. In addition, this thesis also aims to provide an empirical contribution in a way so that practitioners can make use of these results when forming a leadership development program. The results are therefore aimed at providing practitioners with support and inspiration to what issues to highlight and what content to include.

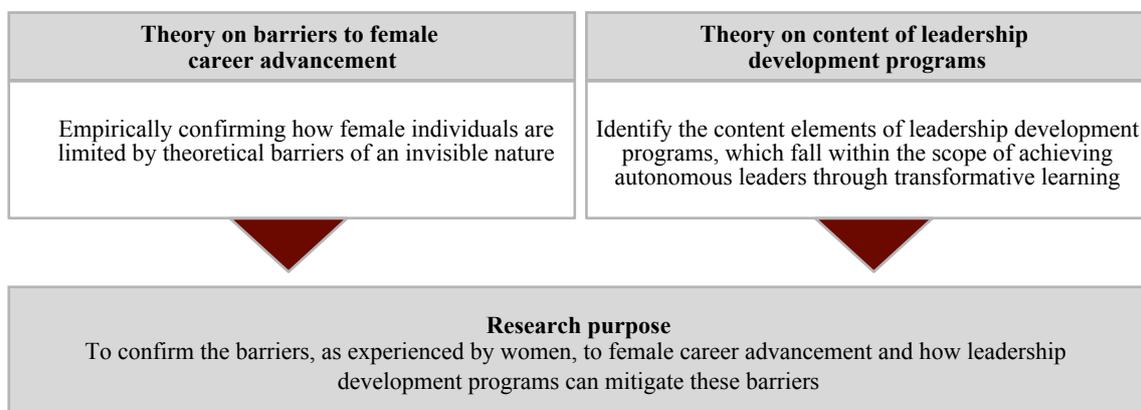


Figure 1: Research Purpose

### 1.6 DEMARCATION

To ensure the relevance and scope of the research question throughout this thesis within the given timeframe, demarcations are necessary to create the proper framing for the research to be conducted. First, there are multiple tools to apply considering the development of leaders. Based on data, the researchers found formal training in the form of developmental programs to be the most commonly used means (DDI 2015) and will thus be the tool of focus throughout this thesis. Second, in terms of development programs, a distinction can be made between managerial and leadership development, where managerial development is more related to the practicalities of being a manager, while leadership development aims to develop leaders. This thesis aims to research the latter. Third, in the field of leadership development, it is necessary to make a difference between the development of leaders and that of leadership. This thesis will consider the development of leaders. Fourth, this thesis will focus on barriers to female career advancement, as opposed to barriers for women in the private or social sphere. Lastly, this thesis will focus on the women of organizations and their barriers to career advancement, as opposed to considering both genders.

### 1.7 DISPOSITION

To guide the reader through the thesis, it has been divided into seven sections, aiming to dive deeper into the researched field.

In section 1, the introduction aims to clarify the purpose of the research and build the background necessary for the reader to put the research into its right

context. Further, it includes the research question, demarcation of the research conducted, and the expected contribution. This is followed by section 2, which is divided into the barriers to female career advancement, autonomous thinking through transformative learning and lastly LDP content. The section is concluded by presenting the summary of research need and the theoretical framework that will be used as a foundation for the empirical research and analysis. Section 3 is an exposition of the methodological considerations, which have been made to ensure that the right research approach was taken when conducting the thesis. It consists of the scientific approach, data collection, data documentation, data analysis and quality considerations.

Following is section 4 which displays the empirical results gathered in order to shed light on the barriers to female career advancement as experienced by the women themselves, as well as findings regarding the case company's program content and how this was perceived by the participants. Section 5 contains the analysis of barriers to female career advancement as well as LDP content, which aims to capture the empirical findings and review them in the light of the theoretical framework in order to find commonalities and make new empirical findings visible. Section 6 will discuss the elaboration of findings, provide the reader with a contextual perspective and lastly complete the theoretical framework. Finally, section 7 will conclude by addressing the research question, theoretical contribution, practical contribution, limitations and future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections provide a review of the theories relevant for the chosen research field. The first part (2.1) aims to capture the barriers to female career advancement. The second part (2.2) addresses the importance of creating autonomous thinkers and the third part (2.3) aims to capture the content of leadership development programs. The chapter continues by summarizing the research need (2.4) and presenting the theoretical framework (2.5) that is built upon literature and will act as a starting point for the empirical findings and the analysis to come.

### 2.1 BARRIERS TO FEMALE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The literature on barriers to female career advancement covers a plethora of perspectives, why a broad selection of theories has been reviewed less extensively in order to provide nuances of the barriers women might face. This is a conscious decision that will help to answer the research question of this thesis and to understand empirical findings. In accord with Barsh, Yee (2012) stating that a distinction can be made between the inhibitors to female career advancement, this section begins by reviewing barriers of an internal nature (2.1.1) and continues by reviewing barriers of an external nature (2.1.2).

#### 2.1.1 INTERNAL BARRIERS

This section concerns internal barriers related to lifestyle choices and the mind-sets of the individual (Barsh, Yee 2012).

##### 2.1.1.1 SELF-CONFIDENCE

It was concluded in a report by DDI (2015) that one of the barriers to female career advancement could be derived to the level of self-confidence a woman possesses. Research shows that women in possession of the same formal skills as their male counterparts were less likely to rate themselves as highly effective leaders in comparison (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker et al. 2014). This implies that women have a tendency to underestimate their own abilities regarding leadership potential. Consequently, the implication of low self-confidence may be that women take themselves out of the leadership equation too soon. As a consequence, women risk missing out on opportunities, which could benefit their career and make them more qualified for promotion and a faster climb of the organizational ladder (DDI 2015). Additionally to the tendency of competence underestimation, Monson (2013) states that women do not use their voices to a full extent, which is supported by Babcock and Laschever (2003). They state that women do not ask for things that men would and overlook the room for negotiations, such as promotions or increased salaries, making women more prone to miss out on opportunities which may come more naturally to men. This female pattern of systematically making the mistake of undermining, undercutting and undervaluing themselves and their competences could be related to the female desire to be liked by others. It is thus of uttermost importance that women let go of the inhibiting need to be liked by others in the workplace and realize their own qualifications in

favor of being professional and requesting the benefits that they rightfully deserve (Monson 2013).

Concluding, in comparison to male peers, women's tendency to underestimate their own competence not asking for what is well deserved, in addition to overlooking the room for negotiation could thus be acting as a barrier for women in their path towards leadership positions.

#### 2.1.2 EXTERNAL BARRIERS

This section concerns external barriers that touch upon structural obstacles and institutional mindsets (Barsh, Yee 2012).

##### 2.1.2.1 PIPELINE

According to Wahl (2003) there is a perception that an individual's professional capability is best signaled through a fast climb of the corporate ladder, resulting in a self-reinforcing spiral where those who gain a promotion early on in their careers are more likely to be on the path of continuous future promotions. This implies that a norm is created where employees of an organization should devote themselves to their professional role completely, preferably early on, in order to ensure this career climb (Kanter 1993). It would also imply that if an employee does not meet these requirements of complete devotion, the pipeline to career advancement and ultimately leadership positions is broken. However, it has been argued by critical researchers that organizations of today are structured as if the professional life would be the single thing constituting people's lives, making the archetypical professional role more applicable to the lifestyle of men while making it more difficult for women to build a career (Fogarty, Allen et al. 1981), seeing that women still do the larger share of household maintenance (Djerf-Pierre 2007). Since women over the last 20 years have decreased their unpaid household work by one hour per day, while men has increased their unpaid household work by eight minutes (SCB 2012), this would imply that women still are responsible for the larger share of household work, but now need to complete it in less amount of time than before (Djerf-Pierre 2007). Issues also arise in terms of parenting, since research suggests that men are more reluctant to take leave, even when financially covered, fearing that doing so would hurt their careers (Han, Ruhm et al. 2009).

As a consequence of aforementioned reasoning, the way organizations are structured in relation to the current status of the expectations on women in regards

to household hours and maternity leave does pose a difficulty for females to stay in the pipeline to leadership and can thus be considered a barrier.

#### 2.1.2.2 ADVERSE SELECTION

Another barrier to female career advancement is considered to be the adverse selection taking place in organizations, controlled mainly by the men already in possession of leadership positions. This is interrelated to the notion of homosociality. In research context, it is defined as a social dynamic, commonly used as a concept of explanation as to why and how men through their relations with each other can uphold and reinforce patriarchy by bonding, building closed teams and thus defending their benefits and positions (Hammarén, Johansson 2014). Male dominance in important positions provide men with the power to set the normative notion regarding what is considered normal (Hirdman 2001) as well as what characteristics or merits may be considered suitable (Wahl 2003). Kanter (1993) claims that these notions are constantly recreated, partly due to the fact that men recruit men.

Homosociality can also partly be explained by the fact that existing leaders try to reduce the uncertainty of their profession through the recruitment of similar others (Wahl 2003; Kanter 1993). Smith and Smits (1994) continue by stating that people prefer spending time with others who share their perception and values; hence preferences are towards spending time with others of our own sex. This can also be seen in organizational networks where men may choose to network with men to a greater extent, which results in women not being included in the same way, ultimately having a negative effect on their opportunities to share valuable connections, information and allies (Ibarra 1993), which strategically could be considered key to achieve promotions or benefits. According to Ely, Ibarra et al. (2011) this results in a vicious cycle where people ultimately will regard men as a better fit for leadership roles due to the paths to such roles having been designed with men in mind. Eagly and Carli (2003) emphasize that people tend to perceive leadership as a masculine activity associated with men and thus discriminate against women in leadership positions due to the mere fact that people do not expect to see women holding these positions, since it challenges our expectations. This reinforcement results in the belief that men are a better fit, which is what keeps gendered practices unchanged.

To conclude, men are more inclined to choose men, which could be considered a means of attempting to managing risk by surrounding oneself with similar others. The notion of not placing the right people in the right organizational positions is referred to as adverse selection, acting as a barrier to female career advancement.

#### 2.1.2.3 GENDER STEREOTYPICAL TRAITS

It has been showed that limiting stereotypes of women can be considered a barrier to their progress (Ruther-

ford 2011) and that a minority position can inhibit women from being allowed to just be individuals, but rather judged on the basis of these stereotypes and generalizations (Kanter 1997). Women could therefore be forced into gender stereotypical roles, which limit their ability to show their full competences as an individual, often leading to assignments of tasks considered “female” regardless of the fact that these tasks may lie beneath their actual level of competence (Kanter 1997).

In regards to leadership it has been found that female leaders are more inclined to emphasize not only task accomplishment but also interpersonal relations more than male leaders do (Eagly, Johnson 1990). Women are also seen as more cooperative, stressing a “morality of responsibility” where the group and avoidance of harm to others come first hand. Men tend to be more competitive and stress a “morality of rights” where individual rights and justice comes first hand (Eckel, Grossman 2001). Kray (2007) states that people, who do not believe the stereotypes to be true, can be affected by the existence of a negative stereotype about a group to which they belong. Also, by reminding a person of a stereotype relevant to them, a distracting concern can be formed for that person so that their behavior and performance will confirm the negative stereotype (Kray 2007).

Stereotypical preconceptions also bring an explanation to the ambivalence towards women with power since people tend to associate powerful women with the first female authority figure encountered - the mother - thus risking our independence and ultimately taking us back to a child-mother relationship (Sinclair 2000).

Concluding, the gender stereotypical roles are preventing women from being individuals by forming expectations of how they should behave. Awareness of the roles is essential in order to not fall victim of its impact. Gender stereotypical traits are thus considered to be a barrier to female career advancement.

#### 2.1.2.4 EXCESSIVE SCRUTINY

Despite aforementioned barriers, some women still rise to leadership positions. However, structural impediments and cultural biases continue to shape their ongoing development and leadership experiences (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011) and as women rise in the organizational hierarchy they become increasingly scarce, thus more visible and consequently become subject to greater scrutiny than their male colleagues who possess the majority of leadership positions (Ibarra, Ely et al. 2013). Under this microscope, women can become risk-averse, overly focused on details and prone to micromanaging in order to assure themselves and others in their surrounding that they are worthy of being in the position they are (Kanter 1977; Kram, McCollom-Hampton 1998). When people focus on how they come across to others, they tend to divert emotional and motivational resources away from the larger purpose at hand. Consequently, they risk losing sight of their

larger purpose as leaders (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011) and what made them leadership material in the first place. This serves as an illustration how intertwined the internal and external barriers are, considering how others' judgments can result in an excessive focus on one's self-image, which can ultimately be self-defeating. The notion of female scarcity in leadership positions can be related to token theory and role incongruity theory, suggesting that female leaders will likely experience an excessive scrutiny of their professional performance. This degree of scrutiny tends to weaken women's ability to lead effectively, and often leads to female leaders perceiving themselves as "outsiders on the inside", thus forced to constantly outperform their male peers (Davies-Netzley 1998; Moore 1988).

Concluding, due to the small share of females in senior positions, there is higher visibility and consequently also scrutiny of their performance in relation to their male peers. This results in women being held to a higher standard by others, which tends to impair the ability of females to carry out an effective leadership.

#### 2.1.2.5 SECOND-GENERATION GENDER BIAS

A shift has taken place in the organizational research on the underlying reasons behind women's constant underrepresentation in leading positions from the intentional efforts to exclude women, into a second-generation form of gender bias which acts as a powerful obstacle to equality (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011). This bias stems from society's cultural beliefs about gender, in combination with prevailing structures at workplaces, practices in everyday life and interaction patterns which continues to favor men over women (Calás, Smircich 2009; Ely, Meyerson 2000; Kolb, McGinn 2009; Sturm 2001). Theory suggests that constructing and internalizing a leader identity is central to the process of becoming a leader (DeRue, Ashford 2010; Ibarra, Snook et al. 2010; Lord, Hall 2005) and these forms of gender bias may impede women's progress by obstructing identity work to take up leadership roles (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011). According to Ely, Ibarra et al. (2011) the outcome of this second-generation gender bias could be considered self-sealing due to the fact that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions validates entrenched systems and the beliefs that reinforce men's advantageous position for leadership roles, thus maintaining status quo.

To conclude, the highly impacting but simultaneously invisible concept of the second-generation gender bias continues to reinforce the notion that men is being favored over women. This affects how women see themselves as leaders in a negative way, thus acting as a barrier to female career advancement.

## 2.2 AUTONOMOUS THINKERS THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Leadership should aim at freeing people from the oppressive structures and habits people encounter in societies and institutional settings, but also within ourselves (Sinclair 2007). One way to do so is through

knowledge, where for example Shakespeare wrote "Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven", which Francis Bacon reduced to the popular saying "knowledge is power", commonly used today (Brown 1989). Obtaining knowledge aims to create awareness in order to improve critical assessment abilities and the ability to recognize frames of references to reach a speculative best conclusion in regards of contested beliefs. Due to this, becoming critically reflective of our assumptions and frames of references is essential in achieving a transformation in our pre-set ways of thinking, collectively called autonomous thinking (Mezirow 1997).

Awareness is also presented as key in counteracting second-generation gender bias (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011). Less this awareness, females are left with societal stereotypical roles constantly reinforced in their own and others' frames of references (Mezirow 1997). Through awareness raised by autonomous thinking on behalf of both men and women, the trap of stereotypical roles can be recognized, enabling females to avoid becoming subject of it or feeling the need to overcompensate by enacting hypermasculine demeanor (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011).

The notion of awareness as key can also be seen in the process of transformative learning which shapes the individual's view of the world and creates structures of assumptions that individuals use to understand what they experience (Mezirow 1991; 1995; 1996; Cranton 1994; 1996). However, these structures also cause selectivity and delimitations in what individuals perceive, which indirectly determines our actions. The objective of transformative learning is to expand an individual's frame of reference through critical reflection upon the assumptions, values and habits that ultimately trigger our actions (Mezirow 1997). There are four ways of transformative learning, depending on the prevailing state of awareness in the individual. These are: to build on an existing point of view, to establish a new point of view, to transform our prevailing point of view, and to become aware and critically reflective of our generalized bias. Individuals need to be challenged and to realize things that do not fit in naturally in their prevailing frames of reference. Outside the comfort zones of simplifying biases in our minds, transformative changes can take place and is assumed to generate autonomous thinking (Mezirow 1997). Depending on the current state of the individual, the process of transformative learning necessary will vary (Mezirow 1997). It needs to be noted that it is not necessary for an individual to go through all of the four processes mentioned above, but more realistically and depending on the context, he or she will go through one or some of them.

The awareness found in autonomous thinking individuals achieved through LDPs could thus be considered likely to address and mitigate internal and external barriers, currently acting as obstacles for women. What thus becomes key is the actual content

of the LDPs offered in order to ensure transformative learning.

### 2.3 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS CONTENT

The literature body of the content of a program is thin, why this research chose four different models of content that together provide nuances of what content a program could ultimately have. Currently programs are not addressing the issue of gender inequality to the extent they potentially could, which this thesis aims to address. The selection of models is thus a conscious decision that will help to answer this thesis research question and to understand empirical findings.

Cacioppe (1998) presents elements, which should be covered in an LDP. One of these elements regards improved self-knowledge and can be captured in a program by providing its participants with the time to reflect upon their learning, hereby mentioned as *identity work*. Action learning, hereby mentioned as *active contribution*, meaning testing behaviors and ideas in action, is a second element and a powerful part of LDPs. This implies hands-on problem solving to achieve results, often within a set deadline. Observation of leadership models is the third element and a big source of learning and is referred to as *transference*. The program leaders as well as the participants all represent different models of behavior, intelligence and interpersonal skills valuable for the others to take part of. A fourth element regards reshaping mindsets and perspectives through information or activities, hereby mentioned as *perception advancement*. Concerning the fifth element, there is a high importance for the participants to experience some improvement in their leadership skills and abilities throughout the course of the program, enabling them to achieve things they could not do before. This will hereby be referred to as *noticeable improvement*. The sixth element regards *participation in the change of direction and culture of the business*. The sense of being able to make an impact and contribute to the firm as a manager is important. Global focus is the seventh element and necessary for LDPs in order to capture the internationalization of markets their firm and network is catering to, hereby referred to as *global outlook*. The eighth element concerns linking up with other participants and forming a valuable *network*.

Sinclair (2007) contributes on the topic of content by presenting three components on the subject of education. Firstly, reflection is a basis for a leader's development and learning, hereby mentioned as *identity work*. The participants should take their life experiences into consideration and give thought to their values to determine where they position themselves as leaders today and where they can develop even further. Secondly, learning comes from experience, hereby included in *active contribution* and *transference*. By observation, analysis and insight from the program participants, leadership is further developed. Thirdly, leadership theories provide concepts and notions, which

should be viewed critically and will hereby be mentioned as *critical review*. This should be incorporated into LDPs for provision of educational value, pushing the participants to reflect more critically and constructively upon their own organizational situations.

Research also exists on how learning relates to the development process, which can be seen in Mezirow's (1997) three guidelines to achieve critical reflection to accomplish transformative learning. The first guideline regards the learner being assisted to successfully be a part of the discourse creation, hereby included in *active contribution*. The second guideline implies that the learner should exercise his or her ability to recognize frames of references and try to reframe issues from an alternative perspective, hereby included in *perception advancement*. The third guideline regards the educator aiding the learner in becoming more aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions, hereby included in *critical review*. The goal of these guidelines is to aid the individual in reaching a state of more autonomous thinking and being able to negotiate their own frames of reference.

In addition to aforementioned theory some research also exists on how gender relates to the content of LDPs. Ely, Ibarra et al. (2011) reveal that gender dynamics form leadership and suggest three principles to increase women's advancement to senior positions through LDPs. The first principle is to create a holding environment to support women's identity work, hereby included in *identity work*. A holding environment is "a social context that reduces disturbing effect and facilitates sense-making". Women-only programs offer an opportunity for participants to engage with similar others who can provide support as they figure out who they want to be moving forward into senior leadership positions. The second principle regards situating topics and tools in an analysis of second-generation gender bias, hereby included in *perception advancement*. Awareness is the key to address the issue since once one is aware of how these biases manifest in their organizations, women are already less susceptible to its effects. The third principle is to anchor participants to their *leadership purpose*. All leaders are susceptible to letting their personal aspirations to advance turn their attention inwards why connecting participants to meaning, values and purpose can be helpful. A summary of above mentioned content is provided in Figure 2.

### 2.4 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH NEED

The aim of this section is to illuminate the gap in prevailing research to conclude how this thesis can contribute by attempting to bridge this gap.

The gap thus refers to the insufficiently research arena regarding the cross-over between the two fields of barriers to female career advancement and LDPs. Through the research conducted in this thesis, the aim is to empirically confirm the theoretically identified barriers experienced by women in leadership positions and to what extent these can be mitigated by the content of LDPs to ultimately contribute to gender balance

## IF I WERE A BOY

in organizations. Consequently this perspective, which addresses leadership as well as gender, calls for a new developmental agenda for women who are on the track to, and aspiring to, leadership positions in their career (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011).

A large share of actors in today's society are showing an increasing demand for diversity, both internally but also in their suppliers (McCracken 2000). Consequently, companies seek LDPs aimed particularly at promoting women in order to achieve a greater diversity through gender balance. It is a matter of ensuring that the best suited individuals, in possession of the greatest skill and fit with the role in question are reaching their full potential, rather than being limited by gender among other aspects (Hewlett, Luce 2005; Zahidi, Ibarra 2010).

The field of leadership is a well-researched topic, which has resulted in an accumulation of knowledge over the years, providing depth into the field (Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011). Leadership conducted in an efficient and effective manner is considered to be one of the main contributing factors to a company's profitability (Hernez-Broome, Hughes 2004; Yukl 2013; Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011), making it a topic worthy of further research from an organizational profitability perspective.

Consequently, by bridging the theory between content of LDPs with barriers to female career advancement and research on the creation of autonomous thinkers through transformative learning, this thesis aspires to confirm the barriers to female career advancement and discover how LDPs can mitigate them.

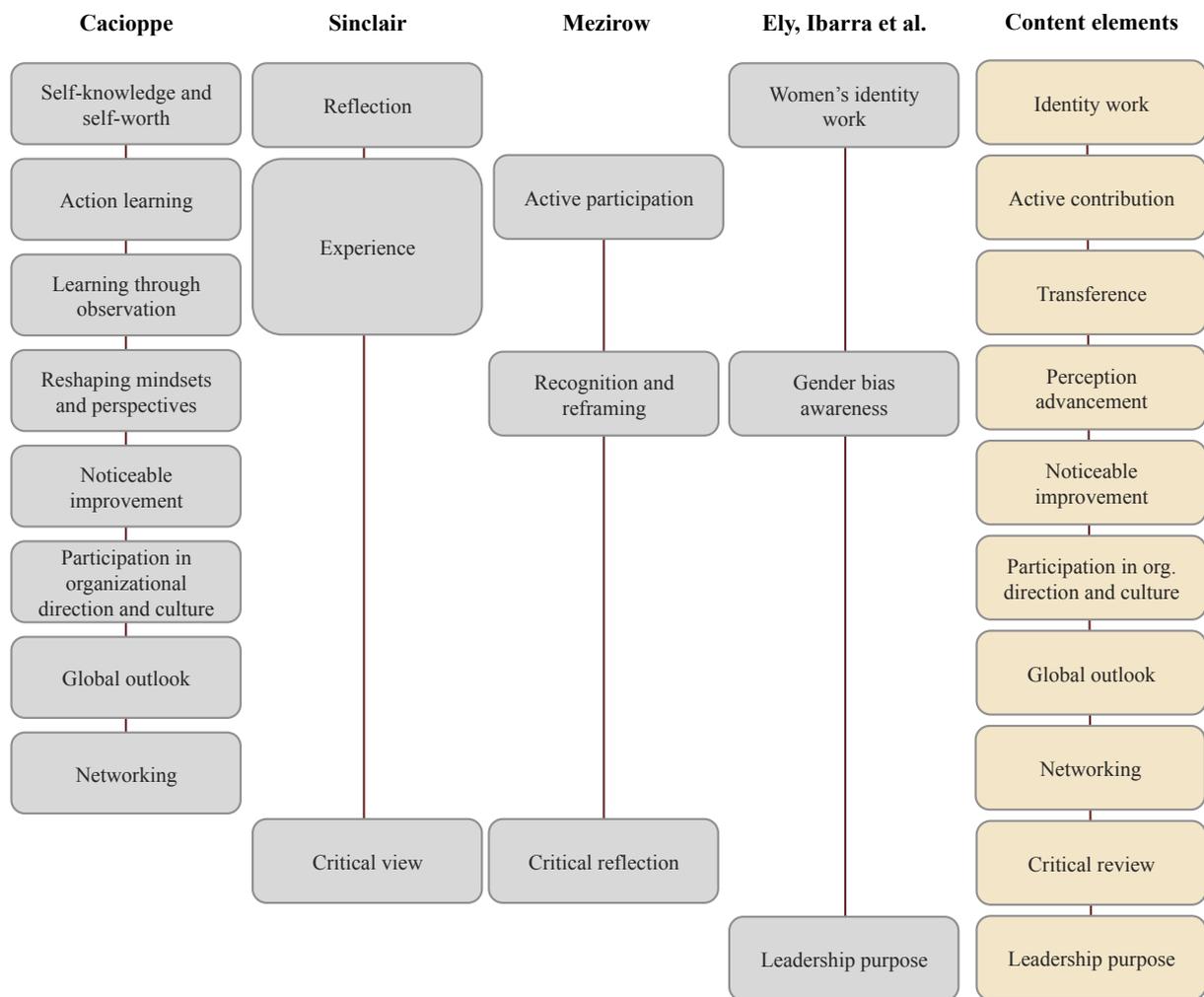


Figure 2: Leadership Development Program Content

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a concluding section to the literature review, a theoretical framework is presented that will guide the empirical research and form basis for the analysis. This framework is built upon a thorough analysis of previous research to support the researchers' desire to close the identified research gap. After a close review of previous research, it could be concluded that no collectively exhaustive model exists to assist in the research, why a theoretical framework was developed, see Figure 3 below. The fact that no dominant model exists is reasonable since the researched bridging area between barriers to female career advancement and LDP content is relatively contemporary (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011). The theoretical framework illustrates the relationship between the two perspectives, barriers and content, and is built upon the body of literature. In order to mitigate the barriers, LDP content is considered to be a means of delivering the awareness necessary to become an autonomous thinker through transformative learning. It should be noted however, that several other aspects besides content could be considered to mitigate the barriers.

Barriers to female career advancement are well researched, capturing a wide range of themes and underlying dimensions. However during the literature review it became clear that literature on leadership development content is relatively sparse. Within the area of LDPs, research exists on how such a program

should be set up, the programs structures and who to partner with. Nonetheless, prior literature steered the researchers through the different concepts and content parts of relevance to this thesis, which enabled the creation of an own conceptualization of the 16 theoretical themes that the researchers expect to find as most relevant from the empirical research to see how LDPs can mitigate these barriers. These 16 themes can be found explained below.

This framework concretizes the different themes of this thesis, with its focal point in the two perspectives: barriers and content. Barriers to female career advancement are in this research defined to include *self-confidence, pipeline, adverse selection, gender stereotypical traits, excessive scrutiny* and *second-generation gender bias*. LDP content is in this research defined to include *identity work, active contribution, transference, perception advancement, noticeable improvement, participation in organizational direction and culture, global outlook, networking, critical review, leadership purpose*. The themes might be altered after they have been tested against the empirical data. Within the themes, 20 theoretical categories were also identified from aforementioned literature review in order to support the analytical process. A more detailed view is therefore presented in the Thematic Framework (Figure 4), which is presented in section 3.4.2. For an analysis of the empirical data see Section 5.

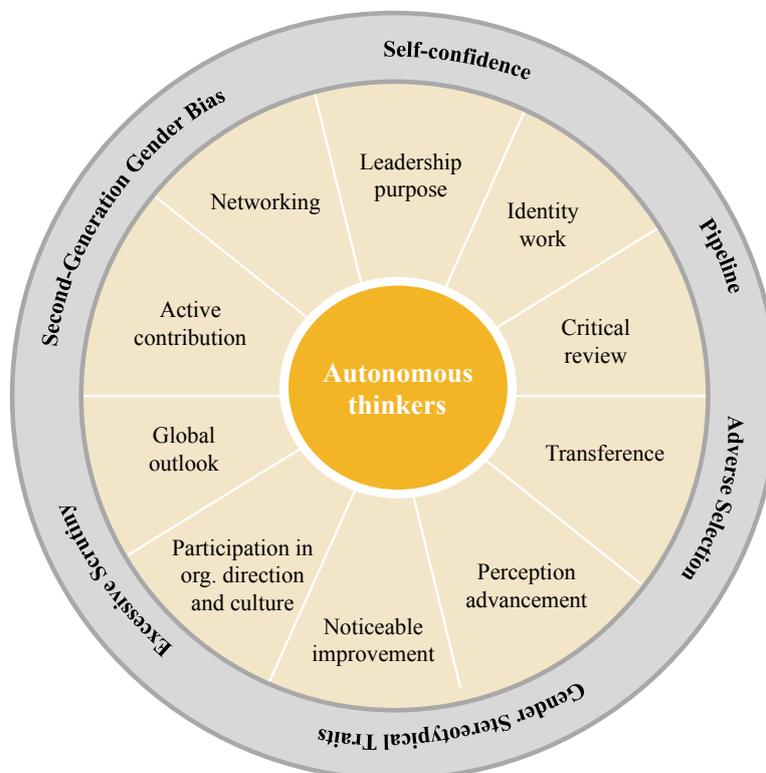


Figure 3: Theoretical Framework

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The following sections provide a presentation of the chosen methodology. The first part (3.1) aims to capture the scientific approach. The second part (3.2) addresses how the data was collected. The third part (3.3) concerns how the collected data was documented, leading to the fourth part (3.4) of how this data was analyzed. The chapter continues by summarizing quality consideration (3.5).

#### 3.1 SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

The following sections will present the scientific approach in terms of research considerations (3.1.1), research approach (3.1.2) and research case (3.1.3).

##### 3.1.1 RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

The ontology of this thesis is of a constructionist point of view, challenging the proposition that phenomena such as culture and organizations are pre-determined. The social properties are an output of the interaction between individuals (Bryman, Bell 2011). Therefore this thesis focuses on the prevailing gender inequalities in leadership contexts and that these are a creation of social interaction between individuals. Culture is thus considered to be in a constant state of construction and reconstruction, supporting the possibility of being able to address cultural issues in order to achieve change, in this case to benefit gender equality in organizations.

##### 3.1.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The following sections will present the research approach in terms of research purpose (3.1.2.1), research method (3.1.2.2), research reasoning (3.1.2.3) and research scope (3.1.2.4).

###### 3.1.2.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE

This thesis is conducted with an exploratory purpose, aiming to look into an insufficiently researched field by gathering preliminary data, which helps set the direction for future research (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2009). The objective is therefore to identify key issues when it comes to what content to include in LDPs to mitigate the mentioned barriers.

###### 3.1.2.2 RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative approach is applied, aiming to identify phenomena through rich material gathered in interviews. Qualitative approaches are suitable when the phenomenon in question is socially constructed, making an in-depth understanding necessary (Alvesson, Sköldberg 2008). Finally, the choice of a qualitative approach is supported by Conger (1998), who finds it suitable for a research within the field of leadership. It should be noted that according to Bryman, Bell (2013), the qualitative research lacks transparency due to the nature of the method being substantially sparse in regards to method description. However, the researchers agree with Conger (1998) and Alvesson, Sköldberg (2008) that the qualitative approach is suitable for this research field.

###### 3.1.2.3 RESEARCH REASONING

Considered suitable in the context of qualitative research (Alvesson, Sköldberg 2008), the approach ap-

plied in this thesis is abductive, which takes advantage of both the deductive and inductive methods while also providing additional benefits (Suddaby 2006). Through the course of the process, the empirical scope is successively developed, while theory is refined and adjusted accordingly.

###### 3.1.2.4 RESEARCH SCOPE

The method applied will aim to result in an intensive rather than extensive research through a lower number of units researched, outweighed by a larger number of variables. This provides good potential in achieving relevant data, but could risk a limited possibility of generalization to a greater population (Jacobsen 2002). Considering that the thesis attempts to provide high quality insight by closing a prevailing research gap in the theoretical fields of leadership development along with gender, intensiveness is thus preferable.

##### 3.1.3 RESEARCH CASE

For this thesis main empirical data collection a case study method is chosen. Case study research concerns the complexity and particular nature of the case in question (Stake 1995) and is a commonly used research design (Eisenhardt, Graebner 2007). A case study method is considered appropriate since the thesis examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 2009) and is suitable when applying an abductive approach (Alvesson, Sköldberg 2008). This thesis will use a single based case study method to study one organization, which is considered representative for the researched phenomenon (Yin 2012). By studying a single case this can be done extensively to provide deep insight and is preferred although common critique of case studies regards difficulties to generalize from one organization to another (Yin 2009).

###### 3.1.3.1 SELECTION OF CASE COMPANY

When conducting a case study, case selection is the most important methodological decision (Dubois, Araujo 2007) and should be based on where the learning will be the greatest (Bryman, Bell 2011). The case company selected for this thesis is Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB, hereafter referred to as BDH, due to its suitability in providing insight into the phenomenon which the research question relates to. This case company relates to what Stake (1995) identifies as an instrumental case where the focus is to use the case as a means of understanding a broader issue, the issue being few women in leadership positions and ways to mitigate this. BDH claims to be unique in their offering on the Swedish market with their gender focused LDPs. In addition, their purpose is to "provide oppor-

tunities, skills and insights for women to take their leadership to a higher level and to create a clear idea of how to come across as a leader and woman that is worth following” (Dahlbom-Hall 2016). BDH could therefore provide the researchers with an opportunity to obtain insight into factors limiting women in their careers, along with strategies to mitigate these.

### 3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The following sections will present the data collection in terms of semi-structured interviews (3.2.1), pilot interview (3.2.2), interview guide (3.2.3), participant sampling (3.2.4) and interview setting (3.2.5).

#### 3.2.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The approach applied throughout the pilot study and main study was of a semi-structured kind, preferred in qualitative research (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2009; Edmondson, McManus 2007; Miles, Huberman 1994). The semi-structured method of interviewing applies open questions to generate deeper insights since interviewees can bring up aspects they personally find relevant. The interviews were based on an interview guide covering a range of questions, where room was left for the respondent to elaborate further (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2009) in order to gather more reliable data and thus support the research question (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2009; Quader 2007) in a way that is difficult through standardized questions (Ahrne, Svensson 2011). Further, it is a method suitable for a topic considered somewhat sensitive and rather complex, which is the case of this research in terms of personal experiences, career and own self-perception (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2009).

#### 3.2.2 PILOT INTERVIEW

Four pilot interviews were conducted to test the research approach prior to launching the study in its entirety. The interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes, with two women who had not participated in a program provided by BDH and two women who had done so in the last three years. This was done to test the relevance of the research question for the chosen case company as well as the design of the semi-structured interview method and interview guide.

A pilot study was found helpful in numerous ways. Firstly, it provided opportunities for identifying potential caveats (Yin 2010; Polit, Beck et al. 2001) in the used questionnaire. Secondly, it helped to ensure that questions could be reformulated before the launch of the study in its entirety (Peat, Mellis et al. 2002). Lastly, a minor alteration was made to improve the interview guide, originating from the researchers' observation about interviewees' uncomfotableness regarding the early placement of self-confidence questions, why it was placed further towards the end.

The researchers transcribed and analyzed the interviews to conclude that a difference could be identified in the generated answers between the two groups of women. Although both appearing equally aware

about barriers to females career advancement, the group of women who had participated in a program provided by BDH were more aware of different tools and strategies to mitigate these barriers. The women who participated in this program declared high potential of this type of program in addressing the issue of barriers obstructing female career advancements and considered the program to be a strong tool in achieving a change. It was therefore considered suitable to proceed with the main study by focusing on the women who had participated in the program to seek further insight. This confirmed the relevance of LDPs in the context of gender equality and was thus investigated further. The pilot interviews were considered satisfactory and the interviews conducted with the two women that had participated in the program were added to the number of participants of the main study.

#### 3.2.3 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Two different interview guides were used when interviewing the participants and the case company, although designed upon the same reasoning. For a detailed view of the interview guides, see Appendix 4 and 5. The participant interviews started with information regarding the anonymity of the respondent and their employer throughout the study to ensure that the respondent felt able to speak as freely as possible. The interview guide itself was considered a guide for discussion, rather than a manuscript. Throughout the interview, questions were kept varied and the follow-up questions depended on the respondent's answer, enabling the interviewers to steer the dialogue in directions of interest (Yin 2013; Saunders, Lewis et al. 2009).

The interview guide consisted of four parts: a) background, b) barriers to female career advancement, c) content and d) concluding questions. The interviews started in rather basic questions in part a), not requiring too much reflection, but instead intuitive answers from the respondents, addressing the interviewees' educational and professional background. It also provided the researchers with the opportunity to become more familiar with the interviewee. Information considered more basic was gathered prior to the interview through e-mail, such as age, firm of employment, position and industry in order to avoid fact-based questions, which would make the interview too stilted. Further, the background section also aimed to discover the respondent's experience with LDPs and their reason for participating.

The following part b), barriers to female career advancement, aimed to discover which barriers the interviewees personally experienced. In addition, the researchers wished to gain insight into what the solution may be to these issues according to the interviewees. Section c) aimed to provide insight into the content of the case company's program, what their greatest insights were from the program they participated in and why. The concluding section d) looked into the interviewees opinion regarding what is key in creating

equality more generally and closed the interview session by asking if there was anything else she would like the researcher to know additionally, which may have been overlooked.

### 3.2.4 PARTICIPANT SAMPLING

The empirical findings are based on 16 interviews with women (see Appendix 1 for a brief presentation of the sample). Guest, Bunce et al. (2006) suggest that saturation often occurs around twelve interviewees in homogeneous groups. In addition, Crouch, McKenzie (2006) suggest that fewer than twenty interviewees in a qualitative study improve the “open” interchange of information, helping researchers to form an adjacent relationship. To ensure saturation is reached one has to go beyond the point of saturation to ensure that the emergence of new concepts or themes is exhausted. This thesis participant sampling constitutes a homogenous group in the sense that they all took part in the same LDP. However, they did not know each other before the program and are holding different positions at different organizations within different industries all around Sweden, why 16 interviews was determined satisfying.

The researchers accessed the 16 female leaders using two subsequent steps. Firstly, BDH provided access to their participant database. Secondly, 50 female participants of the last three years were randomly selected, whereof 10 were excluded due to employer duplication in order to create a nuanced data collection as well as to acknowledge a social perspective with different geographical market areas. In addition, three years was set as the maximum boundary in order for the participants to remember the program and their learnings.

In addition to these 16 interviews, two interviews were conducted with the founder of the program as well as the current CEO of BDH to provide the study with a general perspective and to clarify the purpose and method of the LDP. In Appendix 1 is a list of all 20 interviewees who participated in both the pilot and main study.

### 3.2.5 INTERVIEW SETTING

The interviews carried out in person took place at the offices of the interviewees to ensure their convenience and to make the participation effort minimal. However, the larger share of the interviews was carried out over phone, due to the fact that the sample group was spread across the country. All interviews were held in the mother tongue of both the interviewers and the interviewees, Swedish, avoiding miscommunication and aiming at making the respondents as comfortable as possible. Every interview lasted for approximately 30-60 minutes and having both researchers present at each interview ensured that the data collected through the

interviews could be interpreted without variations (Eisenhardt 1989).

### 3.3 DATA DOCUMENTATION

Throughout the interviews, one researcher was responsible for leading the discussion while the other was responsible for taking notes. The researchers took turns in these two tasks to provide a balanced set of interviews over the course of the research and to minimize their own influence. A discussion was held after each interview of the interpretation regarding the data gathered and transcription of the interviews were done within 24 hours after the interview, providing a closer knowledge of the insights gained from the data (Bazley 2013).

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The following sections will present the data analysis in terms of data analysis method (3.4.1) and data analysis process (3.4.2).

#### 3.4.1 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

When analyzing collected data, a thematic analysis method was used for categorizing qualitative data through emerging themes that are considered important to the description of the research phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear et al. 1997). A theme is described as “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998, p.161). A suitable code is one that apprehends the qualitative fruitfulness of a phenomenon and involves recognizing an essential moment and encoding it prior to the interpretation process. Hence the researchers developed codes, words or phrases that function as labels for segments of data (Boyatzis 1998).

In the case of this thesis, the approach is theoretically thematic, starting from theory with interviews designed to provide answers to what is essential in finding out. The findings are then sorted into the given themes. This was due to the fact that the researchers felt the need to get the initial theoretical insight necessary to formulate the proper research question and carry out the thesis in a reliable way prior to being able to oscillate between empirics and theory abductively throughout the rest of the thesis process.

#### 3.4.2 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

As aforementioned, a thematic analysis is applied for categorizing qualitative data through emerging themes, which are considered important to the description of the research phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear et al. 1997). The 16 themes and 20 categories, which emerged from the literature body can be seen in Figure 4 below.



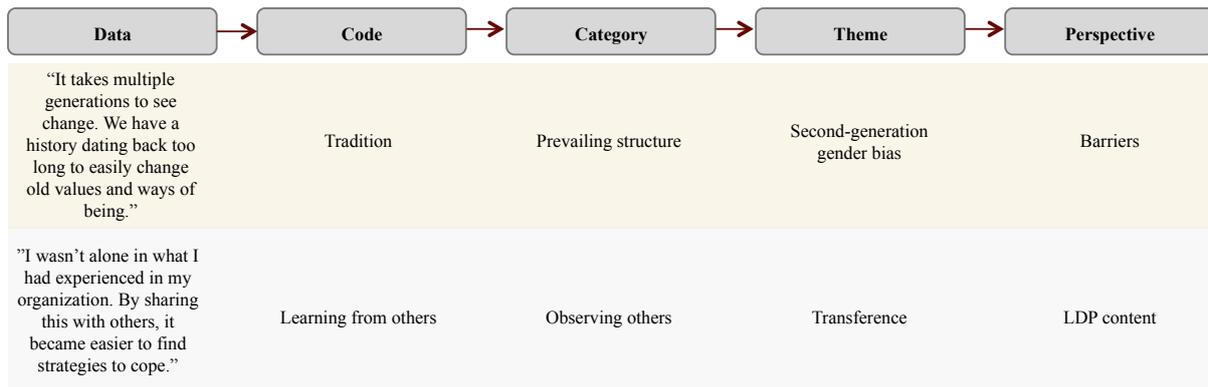


Figure 6: Example of Data Analysis Process

The aforementioned process aims to create an overview of the analytical approach. In reality, the process was a more iterative and entailed continuous step back and forth, resulting in a data analysis process influenced by trial and error where the transcripts were processed continuously to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of respondents' statements.

### 3.5 QUALITY CONSIDERATION

The following sections will present quality aspects in terms of reliability (3.5.1) and validity (3.5.2).

#### 3.5.1 RELIABILITY

The degree to which a research is replicable is referred to as the external reliability (Bryman, Bell 2013). Bryman, Bell (2013) consider this difficult to achieve due to the impossibility in freezing a social setting. However the use of a case company does make this research specific to some extent. This tends to have a negative impact on the transferability of the research to another context. However, the case company, process of data collection and analysis have been described as thoroughly as possible, thus attempting to ensure comprehensiveness and potential for future research replication. Internal reliability (Bryman, Bell 2013) regards the subjectivity of the researchers empirical interpretation. This was counteracted through the presence of both researchers at interviews, a joint discussion regarding content interpretation, followed by an individual coding of the data (Bazeley 2013), where in case of opposing views, alternatives were discussed in order to find the most suitable solution. Although precautions have been taken in order to assure a higher reliability, acknowledgement must still be made to the fact that a

bias to some extent still is an inevitable part of the process (Elliott, Timulak 2005), deriving from the experiences and interpretations of the researchers.

#### 3.5.2 VALIDITY

Validity addressed the integrity of the conclusions generated in the research (Bryman, Bell 2011) as well as the measuring of the right things (Kvale 1995). Bryman, Bell (2011) highlights a risk of lower validity since analysis of qualitative data is built on the researchers' individual interpretations. Validity can be segmented into two parts, internal and external (Yin 2013; Bryman, Bell 2011). Internal validity refers to the match between researchers' observations and the developed theoretical ideas (LeCompte, Goetz 1982), which is a strength of qualitative research due to lengthy participation of a group in the social life over a long period of time (Bryman, Bell 2011). In addition this research achieves, in accordance with Eisenhardt, Graebner (2007), an increased validity due to the participant sampling (see Section 3.2.4) where the sampling consisted of a broad sample of career women from different companies in diverse industries. Furthermore, according to Peat, Mellis et al. (2002) by executing four pilot interviews preceding the main study, the internal validity is increased. External validity of a study refers to the degree to which the findings can be generalized across social settings (Bryman, Bell 2011; Lincoln, Guba 1985). In order to improve and facilitate the study's transferability, a detailed description of the used processes and methods are provided in above sections.

## 4. EMPIRICAL RESULT

The following sections outlines a presentation of the thesis empirical results and is structured according to the theoretical framework, which was assumed the most appropriate structure to capture findings from the 18 interviews. In each section quotes from interviewees are used to substantiate the findings, but quotes from every woman are not included, see Appendix 2 and 3 for a complete overview of identified codes and amount of women mentioning the codes. The first part (4.1) presents the findings of barriers to female career advancement, followed by an introduction to the case company (4.2). The third section presents the findings of leadership development program content (4.3).

### 4.1 BARRIERS TO FEMALE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The following sections will present empirical findings of women's barriers, as experienced from their own organizations in terms of *self-confidence* (4.1.1), *pipeline* (4.1.2), *adverse selection* (4.1.3), *gender stereotypical traits* (4.1.4), *excessive scrutiny* (4.1.5), *second-generation gender bias* (4.1.6) and the new finding *lack of female support* (4.1.7).

#### 4.1.1 SELF-CONFIDENCE

The findings regarding *self-confidence* resulted in three codes related to how the interviewees view their self-confidence and the expectations they put on themselves (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.1.1. LACKING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Six women confess to having low self-confidence in their professional life (Int\_16; Int\_12; Int\_3), but state that it improves with time and experience (Int\_3; Int\_12; Int\_7). Low self-confidence was also said to affect job opportunities, resulting in women taking themselves out of the equation too soon (Int\_8; Int\_11; Int\_13; Int\_5).

##### 4.1.1.2 SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Some interviewees had to put a lot of effort into building their self-confidence (Int\_6), some of which through LDPs (Int\_8; Int\_1), providing confidence in their abilities (Int\_8):

*"I less frequently fall into this trap and can now work with making other women understand what is enough. I don't have these expectations on them, they have these expectations on themselves."* – Int\_1

##### 4.1.1.3 HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Seven women mentioned always having been their own biggest critics but are now trying to focus on their strengths (Int\_4; Int\_12). Nevertheless, women compare themselves with male achievements, creating a bias of the female performance (Int\_3; Int\_13).

*"Men perform "Good enough" while women wondered "Is this good enough?" even when outperforming. A woman might think that expectations are higher than a man would."* – Int\_13

Further, women felt the need to take on the "good girl"-role, focusing on performance and deadlines even

though others don't (Int\_2; Int\_3; Int\_13), speculating that this starts already in primary school (Int\_13; Int\_8).

#### 4.1.2 PIPELINE

The findings regarding *pipeline* resulted in three codes relating to how interviewees struggle with family matters (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.2.1 WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Six women state that work-life balance poses as a barrier to career advancement (Head\_1; Int\_12; Int\_2; Int\_14; Int\_12; Int\_1). It is difficult to not be regarded as a bad mother due to spending many hours at work (Int\_14) and some women feel more responsible for the home and children because they were taught so (Head\_1; Int\_1).

*"My husband is a consultant, travelling quite a lot, and I felt that I cannot do that to. For me there hasn't been an alternative. I don't think my husband considered that."* – Int\_12

##### 4.1.2.2 PATERNITY LEAVE

Five women found equal maternity and paternity leave important, and essential for a more equal organization (Head\_1; Int\_15; Int\_13; Int\_2; Int\_12).

*"It is important to help young men, supporting them in taking paternity leave. You have to invest in both young men and women to get anywhere. The result will be no differences in hiring men or women."* – Int\_15

##### 4.1.2.3 MATERNITY LEAVE

Maternity leave can pose issues to professional women regarding decisions organizations make while they are away. Issues concerned projects being transferred to other employees without asking the female on leave (Int\_15) and roles disappearing during the leave (Int\_8). Another woman mentioned maternity leave to have a negative effect on salary and that she fell behind male colleagues (Int\_14).

#### 4.1.3 ADVERSE SELECTION

The findings regarding *adverse selection* resulted in two codes, relating to how the interviewees were overlooked as women (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.3.1 HOMOSOCIALITY

Ten women experienced men choosing men over women, supporting that that male networks have each

other's backs and recruit one another (Int\_13; Int\_7; Int\_8; Int\_12; Int\_3; Int\_6), most often those similar to themselves (Int\_5; Int\_6).

*“Men choose men, someone who is similar to them, which doesn't create the best diversity. Men have to actively work with this and support young women.” – Int\_2*

#### 4.1.3.2 OVERLOOKED AS A WOMAN

There are many women who would do a good job, but as long as they are not identified as good candidates the capacity available are not being fully used (Int\_4), and if the recruitment base is the same and fewer women hold leadership positions, then something is erroneous with the selection process (Int\_11).

Women stated that male colleagues made efforts to shut them out (Int\_16) and that men are of the impression that the male characteristics are of higher value (Int\_3). This makes women's ability to perform their tasks more difficult and demanding:

*“The chair of the meeting did not look at me once, I was invisible at this table and when I tried to speak I didn't have the power or the space that I was used to have when working with women.” – Int\_6*

#### 4.1.4 GENDER STEREOTYPICAL TRAITS

The findings resulted in two codes relating to roles put upon women (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.4.1 FEMALE STEREOTYPES

Enacting stereotypes is neither beneficial for women nor men and should be avoided (Head\_1). Women can diminish themselves to avoid others being intimidated (Int\_10) or taking the maternal role (Int\_12). Women could also aim to please others to the extent that they are considered incompetent (Int\_10).

Leadership as masculine traits is used as a template when recruiting (Int\_16), which was countered by some women through enacting masculine stereotypes (Int\_16; Int\_9; Int\_3; Int\_1).

*“Countless women adapt to the male leadership role. That isn't what we're after. We want women to be women.” – Int\_9*

Other women dislike this behavior, considering it to reinforce inequality (Int\_3; Int\_16), highlighting that everyone should be true to oneself (Int\_3) disregarding gender (Int\_16).

##### 4.1.4.2 STEREOTYPICALLY LABELED

Stereotypical labeling considers women to serve others, be beautiful and pleasant (Int\_4), forming expectations on how women should act (Int\_3; Int\_10).

*“Women aren't expected to compete but to please. So when a woman do not behave accordingly, the feedback is far from positive.” – Int\_10*

Women's identities are minimized (Int\_13; Int\_5), commonly labeled “woman” rather than actual professional titles. Having a child makes peers second-guess assigning women projects or whether she is pregnant again (Int\_13). When new in their role women received sexist comments (Int\_14) as well as expectations to prepare coffee before meetings (Int\_8).

#### 4.1.5 EXCESSIVE SCRUTINY

Three codes were discovered, relating to excessive scrutiny of women (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.5.1 HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

Twelve women experienced higher expectations. Outperforming male peers to achieve legitimacy in their positions and during recruitment (Int\_15; Int\_2; Int\_14; Int\_8) caused women stress (Int\_4). Some experienced this earlier in their careers (Int\_5), while others felt increasing scrutiny:

*“Things changed. I think it has to do with climbing the hierarchy, which is male dominated and a tough league to play in.” – Int\_13*

Being judged stricter makes minor mistakes into larger issues, reinforcing higher expectations (Int\_5). If a woman makes a mistake, the whole female population carries the consequences (Int\_8, Int\_12). Evidently, one woman had to publish four times as many articles as her male colleague to reach the same position (Int\_7).

##### 4.1.5.2 HIGHER IMPACT

Some considered the visibility advantageous (Int\_15; Int\_16). Besides getting attention more easily (Int\_5), others in the organization appreciated diversity in terms of competence and insights (Int\_12).

*“I've always been in male dominated contexts. I think it's a benefit, you are treated better.” – Int\_15*

##### 4.1.5.3 MEN CAN SLIDE

Some women admitted to having lower expectations on their male colleagues (Int\_12; Int\_8), allowing them to underperform due to forbearance (Int\_4; Int\_1; Int\_3). Consequently, men just have to be “good enough” (Int\_1).

*“Men can be average, but women need to put up with more and be incredibly good.” – Int\_10*

#### 4.1.6 SECOND-GENERATION GENDER BIAS

Two codes were discovered, relating to second-generation gender bias (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.6.1 TRADITION

Eleven women state traditions to be why few women hold leadership positions, being a deeply rooted issue. Consequently, breaking the pattern is difficult since we grew up shaped by traditions (Int\_7; Int\_1; Int\_11; Int\_9; Int\_2; Int\_5).

*“It takes multiple generations to see change. We have a history dating back too long to easily change old values and ways of being.” – Int\_16*

The old gender roles are subconscious filters to perceiving reality (Int\_3), regardless of the decisions we make to improve things (Int\_12). Consequently, childhood upbringing becomes important for future potential in breaking these traditions (Int\_14).

#### 4.1.6.2 EQUALITY IN PROGRESS

Although a large share of the women stated that they have a positive outlook on the progress of gender equality, some were disappointed over the extensive time it takes for actual difference.

*“I’m surprised and disappointed so little has changed. I went into life thinking it was equal, and now I’ve reached the end of my career only to realize that we haven’t at all achieved what I had hoped for.” – Int\_7*

However, some women believe in the change that is taking place.

*“We had a management conference where more than half were women. 10-20 years ago it would only have been men.” – Int\_6*

Inequality is on the agenda today, which is a step in the right direction (Int\_7; Int\_16; Int\_10).

#### 4.1.7 LACK OF FEMALE SUPPORT

Another barrier to women's career advancement was discovered through the interviews, which touched upon the lack of female support (see Appendix 3).

##### 4.1.7.1 FEMALE ROLE MODELS

Majority of the women discussed the importance of having female role models (Head\_1) since it makes the vision of being a female leader all the less abstract (Int\_15; Int\_16; Int\_12; Int\_2).

*“When applying for becoming professor, I felt guilt. I saw all the other professors, whereof 35 men and 2 women. I felt that there were only supposed to be men there. That is when I realized the importance of role models.” – Int\_15*

The women also mentioned the difference you can make by becoming a role model yourself (Int\_15; Int\_7), contributing to a ripple effect of awareness and be able to back other women (Int\_2).

*“It’s necessary to get more women into leading positions to help other women.” – Int\_13*

This helpfulness is something men are better at, and women in senior positions have to embrace towards their younger co-workers (Int\_4; Int\_6).

##### 4.1.7.2 WOMEN BLOCKING WOMEN

Women also block each other. When asking what they had experienced as obstacles to career development, several interviewees answered “other women” (Int\_4; Int\_15; Int\_13; Int\_10; Int\_1; Int\_9). Jealousy towards those few women in higher positions could imply the tendency to block each other more, while being easier on men (Int\_7). There is also a tendency to judge personal choices such as working late, being away from family when travelling and maternity leave (Int\_2; Int\_13; Int\_1).

#### 4.2 INTRODUCTION TO BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL KONSULT AB

In 1980, the company Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB was founded by Barbro Dahlbom-Hall herself, highly experienced in the field of leadership development and author of several books on the topic. The company was the first in Sweden to offer LDPs with a gender perspective and is still unique on the market. The company consists of three consultants, and a change of CEO took place under July 2015 where the founder made place for Anna Lindberg.

BDH has two main business areas: external programs and internal programs. The external programs offered are called “To lead as a woman” and “To lead as a man”, taking its starting point in the belief that gender is the first and strongest imprint we experience as human beings. The extent to which certain topics, such as power and identity, are discussed in each of the two programs varies depending on the respective needs of men and women in today’s society and organizations. The program targeted at women is offered two times per year, with 12 places available each time. Besides catering to the different needs of men and women, dividing them into separate programs enables a realization of patterns and recognition by sharing experiences of the own gender. The internal programs offered are tailored for their specific customer with the purpose to drive cultural change in a whole organizational department.

The content of the programs is based on the founder’s first-hand experience and theory in order to develop descriptive models for the participants to take part of through analysis and discussions, with the female LDP targeting individuals rather than entire departments and organizations.

The purpose of the program offered to women is to “provide opportunities, skills and insights to take their leadership to a higher level and to create a clear idea of how to come across as a leader and woman that is worth following”, laying the ground for their goal to “start a process that provides greater awareness of what it means to be in a leading role as a woman and be able to lead herself from a gender identity to a female identity” (Dahlbom-Hall 2016).

#### 4.3 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CONTENT

The following sections will present empirical findings of leadership development program content in terms of *identity work* (4.3.1), *active contribution* (4.3.2), *transference* (4.3.3), *perception advancement* (4.3.4), *noticeable improvement* (4.3.5), *networking* (4.3.6), *critical review* (4.3.7) and *leadership purpose* (4.3.8). Due to no empirical findings from neither Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB nor program participants regarding *participation in organizational direction and culture* and *global outlook*, these will not be included in the following sections.

##### 4.3.1 IDENTITY WORK

This section will describe identity work from the perspective of the program as well as the participants.

###### 4.3.1.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL KONSULT'S VIEW

Identity work is covered by the case company's program. All participants formulate answers to their own leadership philosophy, aiming to increase understanding of themselves and their situation, such as describing the situation they are in and receiving feedback from other group members to reflect on their power and impact potential. They also work with feedback to strengthen women's self-worth and view of their own abilities by participants viewing themselves through other people's benevolent eye and sharing positive feedback with each other (Head\_1).

###### 4.3.1.2 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS VIEW

The findings resulted in three codes related to aspects important in terms of identity work as a result of going through BDH's program (see Appendix 3).

Several women stated self-development to be an integral part of LDPs (Int\_14; Int\_9) to realize how you behave in certain situations (Int\_1) and strengthen self-confidence (Int\_3). Further, given their hectic lives it was rare to get the time for valuable reflection (Int\_15, Int\_10).

*"What I experienced as positive was the combination of lectures, group discussions and reflection followed by a follow-up."* – Int\_10

The program helped to develop a strong sense of identity (Int\_1; Int\_11; Int\_3; Int\_7) and realization of prejudices they may carry (Int\_14; Int\_8). By building a stronger sense of identity, you can stand being knocked down because you become anchored in something deeper (Int\_4; Int\_2).

##### 4.3.2 ACTIVE CONTRIBUTION

A code containing more than three participants could not be identified why only the case company's view will be presented.

###### 4.3.2.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL KONSULT'S VIEW

Active contribution is covered in the case company's program. The program most often includes role-playing with participants, mainly regarding situations where participants have to challenge colleagues, to see their situation being played in front of them and obtain ideas on how to handle difficult situations. In addition, the whole program is interactive and experiential, rather than a form of education, where participants discuss and share with the group (Head\_1).

##### 4.3.3 TRANSFERENCE

This section will describe transference from the perspective of the program as well as the participants.

###### 4.3.3.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL KONSULT'S VIEW

Transference is covered in the case company's program. The whole program is based on participants' ability to observe other leadership models in other participants and mirror themselves to find their own best way to lead. This mirroring is done in all exercises throughout the program where they ensure that all participants get the opportunity to talk and listen to each other (Head\_1).

###### 4.3.3.2 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS VIEW

The findings resulted in the one code as a result of going through BDH's program (see Appendix 3).

Some women were surprised by the similarities despite the wide range of industries represented in the program (Int\_6; Int\_11; Int\_9). Others gained realization and perspective by seeing another individual go through the same experience (Int\_5; Int\_13; Int\_6).

*"I wasn't alone in what I had experienced in my organization. By sharing this with others, it became easier to find strategies to cope."* – Int\_6

Further, best-practice sharing (Int\_13) and the opportunity to tap into other successful women's experiences and strategies to manage (Int\_2; Int\_11; Int\_12) was considered rare and highly valued (Int\_14).

##### 4.3.4 PERCEPTION ADVANCEMENT

This section will describe perception advancement from the perspective of the program as well as the participants.

###### 4.3.4.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL KONSULT'S VIEW

Perception advancement is covered in the case company's program. The twelve participants and two leaders provide different perspectives. In addition, looking at leadership from a gender perspective forces everyone to ask how they interpret their own environment and leadership (Head\_1). This is necessary since gender is cemented in the walls, and you do not see it until you encounter other walls (Head\_2).

#### 4.3.4.2 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS VIEW

The findings resulted in two codes as a result of going through BDH's program (see Appendix 3).

As a result of the program, realization of structures was found important for the participants in order to advance in their perception of the impact of gender inequality (Int\_12), and ultimately help other females in the organizations (Int\_2).

*"I was able to see gender structures in a way I previously hadn't. I now know how to act accordingly and use them to my advantage. It is not about changing myself, but to predict the obstacles and use other strategies."* – Int\_3

The ability of the program to raise awareness was a strong benefit (Int\_7) due to the fact that *"without awareness, it is impossible to move forward"* (Int\_11; Int\_12; Int\_4; Int\_6; Int\_9).

#### 4.3.5 NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENT

A code containing more than three participants could not be identified why only the case company's view will be presented.

##### 4.3.5.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL

###### KONSULT'S VIEW

Noticeable improvement is covered in the case company's program. Throughout the nine months, the participants meet and reflect on what they learned since last time and what stuck with them. In addition, the program also has examples of women taking control over their work situation or lives during the program (or shortly after), for example change jobs, change life partner and dealing with difficult conversations to solve a conflict. This improvement is based on new sense of power and energy and a renewed faith in themselves after going through the program (Head\_1).

#### 4.3.6 NETWORKING

This section will describe networking from the perspective of the program as well as the participants.

##### 4.3.6.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL

###### KONSULT'S VIEW

A network can be obtained if desired after having gone through the company's program. Many groups meet every year, even after 10 years, using each other as sounding boards and support (Head\_1).

##### 4.3.6.2 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS VIEW

The findings resulted in one identified code as a result of going through BDH's program (see Appendix 3).

Seven women state that finding a female network during the program was highly valuable and provided strength, especially when bringing together women from different sectors at different leadership positions (Int\_7; Int\_4; Int\_7; Int\_10; Int\_8).

*"Women's networks are important for the need to both reflect and discuss with other women. I think it be-*

*comes clear that there is a need for balance and a women's network can give you this, especially as I'm in a very male dominant organization."* – Int\_12

#### 4.3.7 CRITICAL REVIEW

This section will describe critical review from the perspective of the program as well as the participants.

##### 4.3.7.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL

###### KONSULT'S VIEW

The program offered by the case company emphasizes their anchoring in research, which provides participants with knowledge regarding gender perspectives in leadership, considering that this is seen as the greatest influencing element. Through this, the company aims to raise the awareness necessary to overcome societal structures (Head\_1).

##### 4.3.7.2 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS VIEW

The findings resulted in one code as a result of going through BDH's program (see Appendix 2), touching upon the importance for the content of LDPs to be theoretically based in order to provide a critical stance towards prevailing leadership.

Three women stated that the program was theoretically based, which was considered preferable (Int\_2; Int\_5; Int\_12), providing participants with theoretical research in order to create understanding about their practical experiences (Int\_12).

*"I think it is important to raise practical issues and discuss them, and the program should anchor this in theory. That way you mix the practical with the theoretical."* – Int\_12

#### 4.3.8 LEADERSHIP PURPOSE

This section will describe leadership purpose from the perspective of the program as well as the participants.

##### 4.3.8.1 BARBRO DAHLBOM-HALL

###### KONSULT'S VIEW

Finding a leadership purpose is covered in the case company's program and considered integral. Participants have to find their own roots in values, attitudes and feelings through exercises to go from being externally controlled to be intrinsically driven, and to summarize it in an articulated individual leadership philosophy. This provides leaders with the power and energy necessary to get employees to follow them and to be worth following in their own eyes (Head\_1).

##### 4.3.8.2 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS VIEW

The findings resulted in one code identified as a result of going through BDH's program (see Appendix 3).

Some women highlighted that an important element of the LDP offered by the case company was enabling participants to create a leadership vision and anchor learnings obtained during the program into future actions (Int\_3; Int\_8; Int\_10). This vision and purpose must be anchored within each participant in

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order for them to realize old patterns and reflect over the way they want to lead (Int\_10). *“A leadership development program should include a way out of the program that help the individual forward to find his or her own way to lead.” – Int\_8*

## 5. ANALYSIS

In the following chapter, the researchers will present the analysis of their empirical results. The chapter starts by presenting an analysis of the findings related to barriers to female career advancement (5.1), followed by an analysis of leadership development program content (5.2).

### 5.1 BARRIERS TO FEMALE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

This section provides an analysis of barriers to female career development in terms of *self-confidence* (5.1.1), *pipeline* (5.1.2), *adverse selection* (5.1.3), *gender stereotypical traits* (5.1.4), *excessive scrutiny* (5.1.5), *second-generation gender bias* (5.1.6) and lastly *lack of female support* (5.1.7).

#### 5.1.1 SELF-CONFIDENCE

The empirical findings regarding the category *self-confidence* are in line with what previous literature have found, suggesting that women tend to underestimate their own abilities (DDI 2015; Monson 2013). The researchers' findings contribute to existing research by adding a dimension of time, seeing that some of the women state that as time passes their self-confidence improves. This finding is not unexpected as previous research suggests that women's systematic underestimation can be addressed by LDPs, which in an essence are providing women with the same tools and experiences a long career would, but in a shorter time period (DDI 2015; Howard, Wellins 2009).

Furthermore, the empirical findings also support theory that low self-confidence makes women take themselves out of the leadership equation too soon and risk missing out of opportunities (DDI 2015) since they felt that they do not fulfill the requirements or misjudge their own skills when comparing themselves to the individuals already holding that position, creating a performance bias. This is also in line with women taking on a role of being a "good girl", thus inhibiting a need to be liked by others in the workplace (Monson 2013), which could be linked to research suggesting that all individuals are born equal but that we are imprinted differently throughout life (Knapton 2014).

#### 5.1.2 PIPELINE

The empirical findings are in line with previous literature, suggesting that women still have a larger share of household maintenance thus making it more difficult to build a career and fit the archetypical professional role (Djerf-Pierre 2007; Fogarty, Allen et al. 1981). Empirical findings highlight women feeling more responsible for the home and family, supported by research regarding women and men being imprinted differently throughout their lives (Knapton 2014). This finding may relate to that people make sense of their world by allocating individuals into social categories (Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011), hence women are expected to possess certain characteristics depending on what social category they are associated with. Women's heightened feeling of responsibility could therefore originate from their social category and to fulfill the

stereotypical role of women stressing a "morality of responsibility" (Eckel, Grossman 2001). Moreover, the empirical findings describe the importance of equal maternity and paternity leave, and that maternity leave poses issues to professional women.

An individual's professional capability is best signaled through a fast organizational climb (Wahl 2003), which together with empirical findings of difficulties to find a good work-life balance would imply that women desiring a career could be better off having children at a later point in life. According to empirical findings from *excessive scrutiny* (see Section 4.1.5.1) women experiencing the need to prove themselves to a greater extent than men has an implication on women's pipeline to leadership. The implication is thus an elongation of the pipeline's time frame. The longer the pipeline becomes, the higher the risk of a barrier to female leadership career advancement to breaking the pipeline.

#### 5.1.3 ADVERSE SELECTION

As existing literature highlights, men uphold and reinforce patriarchy by bonding, building closed teams and thus defending their benefits and positions, which is understood through the notion of homosociality (Hammarén, Johansson 2014). Many of the interviewees emphasized this as well, pointing out that regardless of where this was experienced, the male network where they know each other well, hold each other's backs and recruit one another is posing as a barrier to female career advancement. Men are thus looking for similar others, which is in line with Kanter (1993) who says that existing leaders try to reduce uncertainty of their profession through the recruitment of individuals who can more easily be predicted due to an experience of similarity (Wahl 2003; Kanter 1993).

In addition, Eagly, Carli (2003) also state that men discriminate against women in leadership positions due to the mere fact that they do not expect to see women holding these positions as it challenges men's perceptions (Eagly, Carli 2003), which can be seen in empirical findings where male colleagues made efforts to shut women out and thus resisted to identify women as good candidates.

#### 5.1.4 GENDER STEREOTYPICAL TRAITS

As existing literature highlights, it is not uncommon that women are forced into gender stereotypical roles, limiting their ability to show their full competence as an individual (Kanter 1997). Many of the interviewees pointed out that due to norms, people by habit associate masculine characteristics with leadership positions rather than feminine, which shows in recruiting.

Empirical findings showed that women sometimes diminish themselves to avoid intimidating others, which is in line with previous research stating women's tendency to transfer ambivalence towards females in possession of power, associating them with roles such as the mother, creating expectations on women to which they need to comply (Sinclair 2000). According to empirical results, women are not only tagged by their professional role but also by their gender to a greater extent than men are. Ultimately, they are unable to live their true identity, risking being perceived as less competent.

In addition to the theoretical basis, empirical findings provided further insight into the potential countermeasures women engage to break the expectation of enacting gender stereotypical roles, one of which being women enacting masculine traits. However, this behavior could be considered harmful in the long-run seeing that if women have to enact male behavior in order to succeed, it will only make it more difficult for women to succeed. It is pivotal to recognize the existence of gender stereotypes, otherwise there is a risk of being impaired by the effect they still may have, seeing that other people still use the stereotype to categorize individuals (Kray 2007). Therefore the stereotype of women as cooperative, stressing "morality of responsibility" where the group and avoidance of harm to others come first hand (Eckel, Grossman 2001) is challenged by women themselves, which may not be appreciated since it goes against our social categories (Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011) that we utilize as cognitive shortcuts in today's complex world.

#### 5.1.5 EXCESSIVE SCRUTINY

The empirical findings are in line with previous literature, suggesting that scarcity impacts structural impediments and cultural biases shaping the situation for women (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011). However the outcomes of scarcity were of dual natures, whereof one perspective emphasized the experience of higher expectations and the other a potential to make a greater impact.

The findings supported higher expectations being placed on women, related to the concept of being "outsiders on the inside", constantly forcing women to outperform male peers (Davies-Netzley 1998; Moore 1988). This could result in women being increasingly risk-averse with an extensive focus on detail to meet standards (Kanter 1977; Kram, McCollom-Hampton 1998). Further, if a woman makes a mistake, the whole female population carries the consequences, thus certainly adding to the proneness of women's need to perform and resulting in a higher stress-level among women.

A finding beyond the literature body is that the visibility was by some women considered beneficial. Being part of an organizational minority provided them with more attention and ability to make a bigger impact. The result is not too surprising given that the interviews are covering experiences of several individ-

uals employed at different organizations, all of which prioritizing diversity to varying extents.

In addition, men are able to "slide" more easily, implying that rather than women being pushed to perform at par with their male co-workers, it is more a question of outperforming. This was not discovered during the literature review, although a fully reasonable outcome of women being held to higher standards.

#### 5.1.6 SECOND-GENERATION GENDER BIAS

As existing literature highlights, second-generation gender bias continuously tends to favor men over women (Calás, Smircich 2009; Ely, Meyerson 2000; Kolb, McGinn 2009; Sturm 2001). Interviewees emphasized this as well, pointing out that a clear driver of the cultural patterns and prevailing structures in terms of inequality is traditions. Both empirical findings and theoretical evidence confirm the difficulty in changing this bias, given its invisibility and impact on our perception since young age.

It is essential to break the self-sealing mechanism of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011) and the empirical findings supported the hope of this progress. Previous literature did however not explain this development. Breaking the bias cannot be done in one day, but rather over the course of generations. Consequently, the way we raise children becomes important in removing the structural and cultural biases, acting as barriers to female career advancement (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011).

#### 5.1.7 LACK OF FEMALE SUPPORT

Empirical results showed that female role models could play an important part in breaking the second-generation gender bias, which is based on a self-sealing mechanism of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011). This finding emerged through interviews and relates to the research on networks and men recruiting men (Kanter 1993), which gives them the power to set the norms (Hirdman 2001). Seeing other women succeed shows possibility, enabling women to realize their own potential. Additionally, more women in high positions challenges the notion of what is considered normal together with gender stereotypical traits (Eckel, Grossman 2001). However, due to women being a minority in leadership positions today, it is difficult to identify these role models. Further, the effect female role models could have on younger generations captures the importance of raising awareness of structures early on (Calás, Smircich 2009; Ely, Meyerson 2000; Kolb, McGinn 2009; Sturm 2001).

Another empirical finding was women blocking women in their career advancement and a jealousy towards those few women in higher positions. This finding may be in line with research suggesting that as women rise in the organizational hierarchy they become more visible and become subject to greater scrutiny (Kanter 1977; Kram, McCollom-Hampton 1998) from both male and female colleagues. This finding

goes somewhat against previous literature on homosexuality (Hammarén, Johansson 2014). However, it could be that other women consider these successful women as deviants from the traditional, considerate and cooperative female stereotype (Eckel, Grossman 2001). Additionally, women deviating from the stereotypical maternal role are subjects of judgment, affecting their self-confidence as their professional drive overrules their desire to stay at home with their children.

## 5.2 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CONTENT

The following sections will present an analysis of leadership development program content in terms of *identity work* (5.2.1), *active contribution* (5.2.2), *transference* (5.2.3), *perception advancement* (5.2.4), *noticeable improvement* (5.2.5), *participation in organizational direction and culture* (5.2.6), *global outlook* (5.2.7), *networking* (5.2.8), *critical review* (5.2.9) and *leadership purpose* (5.2.10). Even though empirical findings regarding the content elements *participation in organizational direction and culture* and *global outlook* could not be identified from neither Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult nor program participants, they will be discussed in order to analyze potential reasons for this and implications.

### 5.2.1 IDENTITY WORK

The first commonality, which can be found in the models when comparing them cross-characteristically, is Cacioppe's (1998) "self-knowledge and self-worth", Sinclair's (2007) "reflection" and Ely, Ibarra et al.'s (2011) emphasis on "women's identity work". What is recognizable throughout these three concepts is the focus on the self and the importance of active reflection in order to attain insight and understanding of oneself. This promotes reflexivity and the overcoming of potential cognitive biases one might have, in order to realize their past and potential future. This is in line with what the case company offers through their LDP content, aiming to provide essential understanding of the self and promote identity work through feedback and new perspectives. On this note, the female participants in the program showed a high appreciation of this element, acknowledging that a stronger self-confidence and valuable reflection was a prominent part of the content, which is in line with theory. Considering the effect on the women participating in the program, it could be concluded that the aspect of identity work in the content of an LDP could act mitigating towards the barrier women experienced referred to as *self-confidence*, or rather the lack thereof.

### 5.2.2 ACTIVE CONTRIBUTION

Three of the models (Cacioppe 1998; Sinclair 2007; Mezirow 1997) share the importance of participants playing an active part and taking ownership of their own development throughout the program. Trying new ideas, putting them into action straight away and at-

taining experience enables participants to create and reshape discourse. This is in line with what the case company covers in their program through role-playing among other activities, offering interactive and experiential learning. The women did not mention this as a key feature of their experience, which may not be too surprising considering that the women could fail to recognize their own engagement in active contribution. Given the fact that the women already hold leadership positions and to some extent are used to contribute to their context, perhaps without even recognizing it, they may consequently not mention it during interviews. However, the fact that the women did not mention active contribution may also affect their learning process by failing to realize the value of contributing actively in the program and sharing experiences with other participants. The element of active contribution could therefore not be considered to directly mitigate any of the barriers to female career advancement, seeing that the women did not emphasize its importance. Consequently, the value of the aspect *active contribution* as an element of LDPs content could be questioned in this case.

### 5.2.3 TRANSFERENCE

Related to the element of experience mentioned by Sinclair (2007), is Cacioppe's (1998) notion of learning through observation. What the two studies both capture through these concepts is the importance of being able to internalize others' characteristics and beliefs in order to utilize them and develop oneself. By learning from other participants and facilitators, leaders can make even more use of the LDPs. This is a prominent element of the case company's program content, providing participants with exercises to learn from and mirror each other. In accordance with theory, the women who participated in the program emphasized the importance of transference. Finding similarities in their situations as leading women provided a sense of perspective regarding gender inequality as well as a forum for sharing coping strategies and was highly valuable to the women. Consequently, transference could be considered to mitigate the barrier referred to as *second-generation gender bias* since it raises awareness among the women of the invisible patterns and structures.

### 5.2.4 PERCEPTION ADVANCEMENT

LDPs aiming to develop their participants' mindsets should aim to reshape their perspectives through its activities and provision of insights (Cacioppe 1998). This notion is again central in Mezirow's (1997) model of learning, where learners should focus on developing their skills in becoming aware of and able to reframe their perception of things to advance their leadership. This content element should be combined with Ely, Ibarra et al.'s (2011) research on *second-generation gender bias* in order to raise awareness of the issues, which may hold women back in their career development. Empirical findings regarding the case company

show that perception advancement is covered in the program by looking at leadership from a gender perspective, which forces participants to ask how they interpret their own environment and leadership. Realization of structures was also found important for the participants in order to advance their perception on the impact of gender inequality and assist other women in the organizations, which is in accordance with theory. Perception advancement can be considered to mitigate the barrier referred to as *second-generation gender bias* since gender continuously lingers in organizations, only breakable through awareness of its existence. Further, this content element could also mitigate the barrier *gender stereotypical traits*, seeing that perception advancement per definition enables reframing of expected roles assigned to women.

#### 5.2.5 NOTICEABLE IMPROVEMENT

Although not addressed in any of the other three models, Cacioppe (1998) mentions the significance of participants experiencing a sense of improvement in themselves through the course of the LDP. Obtaining confirmation of a difference that has been made could result in a higher motivation to pursue further development as a leader. In accordance with theory the case company's program aims to facilitate noticeable improvement in participants through meetings and reflections during a nine month time period as well as laying the grounds for women to take control of their work situation or lives during the program. However, empirical support for the importance of noticeable improvement could not be found among the participants. This could be due to the fact that the women did not consider the improvements they made post-program to be "noticeable" enough to mention. An implication of not experiencing any noticeable improvements as a result of the LDP, the motivation to continue evolving after the LDP is completed may be affected negatively. The element of noticeable improvement could not be considered to directly mitigate any of the barriers to female career advancement, seeing that the women did not emphasize its importance. Consequently, the value of the aspect *noticeable improvement* as an element of LDP content could be questioned in this case.

#### 5.2.6 PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION AND CULTURE

Cacioppe (1998) includes the importance of having an impact in one's organization after having gone through an LDP and seeing a sense of instrumentality in what has been learned. Although this is not included in the case company's program and not mentioned by the participants, it could still pose as an aspect which provides incentives both for the leader who participates and the organization sponsoring him or her in joining the LDP, seeing that the ultimate goal is to contribute to a successful impact on both organizational culture and direction. This could be related to *noticeable improvement* considering that if the women cannot observe an internal improvement, they may have difficul-

ties in contributing to their sponsor organizations after the program. An implication could be that sponsor organizations fail to see the importance of these programs and decline an opportunity to send one of their employees. The element of *participation in organizational direction and culture* could not be considered to directly mitigate any of the barriers to female career advancement, seeing that the women did not emphasize its importance. Consequently, the value of the aspect *participation in organizational direction and culture* as an element of LDP content could be questioned in this case.

#### 5.2.7 GLOBAL OUTLOOK

Cacioppe (1998) captured the element of global outlook in the context of LDPs. This was not included in the content offered by the case company, nor mentioned as an aspect necessary to include by the women who had participated. Consequently, BDH provides tools and strategies for their participants, which are mainly relevant within a national arena or similar culture. As an implication, this could deteriorate the international value of the LDP that participants can bring into future situations, hence not preparing participants for acting in global markets to any greater extent. It could still be relevant to include, especially when targeting multinational companies which on a daily basis interact with other cultures and thus face different perspectives on what is considered equal in terms of gender, presenting issues that ultimately could impact the organizational view on diversity. The element of *global outlook* could not be considered to directly mitigate any of the barriers to female career advancement, seeing that the women did not emphasize its importance. Consequently, the value of the aspect *global outlook* as an element of LDP content could be questioned in this case.

#### 5.2.8 NETWORKING

Beyond what LDPs primarily offer in terms of content, the potential network that can be gained is an evident benefit (Cacioppe 1998). When gathering individuals, all in the pipeline towards career advancement and with proven potential supported by their sponsoring organizations and letting them go through a collective process of development, shared and gained insights will inevitably contribute to lay the foundation for a valuable network. This is a benefit emphasized by the case company as well, which is considered optional for the participants. The access to such a female-only network is somewhat rare, and the case company's gender divided programs thus naturally enables this network formation in a unique way. In accordance with Cacioppe (1998), several women interviewed found the female network gained through the LDP offered by the case company to be of great value to them for their future success as leaders. Consequently, the female network, providing support, could thus be considered to mitigate the barrier referred to as *lack of female support*.

### 5.2.9 CRITICAL REVIEW

Critical review captures Sinclair's (2007) and Mezirow's (1997) joint importance put on the notion of being able to apply a critical mindset in order to evolve as a leader. A critical and more constructive way of considering things should be applied to oneself, one's organization and others' assumptions. A critical view enables individuals to detect and question prevailing frames of references to enable new ways of perception and making assumptions. This is in accordance with the LDP offered by the case company, anchoring the content in research and literature to enable learning and making the participants use their insights to reconsider their own leadership realities in a critical way to overcome prevailing structures. The women participating considered providing participants with theoretical research in order to create understanding about their practical experiences preferable. Consequently, both barriers referred to as *second-generation gender bias* and *gender stereotypical traits* could be considered mitigated by this content element as it questions prevailing frames of references, which reinforces the existence of aforementioned barriers.

### 5.2.10 LEADERSHIP PURPOSE

Ely, Ibarra et al.'s (2011) third principle of creating LDPs is to anchor the participants in their leadership

purpose. By doing this, women in particular can avoid placing themselves into gender stereotypical roles and pigeonholing themselves. Mezirow (1997) states the importance of the human being to find one's own beliefs and purpose, rather than falling into those of others, capturing the longevity of the impact possible to make through LDPs. This is in line with empirical findings as the case company emphasized the importance of including leadership purpose in their LDP in order to help participants find intrinsic motivation to lead through an individual leadership philosophy, making people follow and to be worth being followed in their own eyes. The importance of an element, which enables participants to form a leadership vision, was confirmed by the women interviewed. It gave the women a "northern star" to navigate their path forward as leaders, but also a tool for reflection of old patterns. Through determination of leadership purpose, women could be considered less likely to be held back by the barrier referred to as *excessive scrutiny*, considering that defining a purpose could mitigate the fact that higher expectations put upon women tend to result in a diversion of emotional and motivational resources from their larger purpose as leaders.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the empirical findings and analysis presented above and starts by making an elaboration on the findings (6.1), followed by a contextual perspective (6.2) and a completion of the theoretical framework (6.3).

### 6.1 ELABORATION OF FINDINGS

The barriers confirmed as experienced by women in leadership positions were *self-confidence*, *pipeline*, *adverse selection*, *gender stereotypical traits*, *excessive scrutiny* and *second-generation gender bias*, all of which were presented in the literature review. Empirical results also provided the researchers with the new barrier *lack of female support*. Potential reasons for this particular barrier not being discovered during the literature review could be the fact that it is insufficiently researched, that it is not included within the researched field, that it was overlooked by the researchers or that *lack of female support* is a topic considered a somewhat taboo in today's modern society.

These findings, which support the existence of barriers for female career advancement, oppose the notion that men and women could be considered to compete under the same conditions (Cockburn 1991). Evidently, women in leadership positions experience aforementioned barriers and barriers of other kinds could reasonably exist also for men. However, the nature of these barriers could differ, implying that the conditions under which men and women compete are not the same. Further, in accordance with Wahl (2003) gender equality could be considered to be a future result achieved through generational succession, dependent on efforts made by today's society to counteract these barriers in order to fast-forward gender equality, emphasizing the importance of addressing these barriers to the greatest extent possible in order to make a difference for the future. By being able to impact how people make sense of their world through the allocation of individuals into social categories such as gender (Bolden, Hawkins et al. 2011), gender inequality could be improved. Considering society's ever increasing complexity and pace, the need for individuals to take cognitive shortcuts is higher than ever, which risks reinforcing the prevailing gender stereotypes if not addressed.

The elements of LDP content found important to mitigate mentioned barriers, which could be confirmed as included by the case company and valuable for the female participants were *identity work*, *transference*, *perception advancement*, *networking*, *critical review* and *leadership purpose*. The two content elements *active contribution* and *noticeable improvement* were included in the LDP content offered by BDH, but not highlighted by the women participating in the program as relevant. Further, the two content elements *participation in organizational direction and culture* and *global outlook* were not empirically included by the LDP content provided by BDH or highlighted by the women participating in the program. Given the analysis, these four elements were not found to mitigate any

of the confirmed barriers. However, mitigating barriers may not be the main purpose of these elements in the first place given the general nature of some models in the literature review on content provided in Section 2.3. They may still be considered relevant to include in an LDP in general, however, they could not be considered to be particularly suitable for the purpose of providing a gender perspective. Conclusively, according to the findings of this thesis it would not be considered necessary to capture these elements in an LDP, if the sole aim of this inclusion would be to mitigate barriers to female career advancement.

Six out of ten elements of content were found highly valuable in order to mitigate barriers to female career advancement: *self-confidence*, *second-generation gender bias*, *gender stereotypical traits*, *excessive scrutiny*, and the new additional barrier *lack of female support*. The barriers *pipeline* and *adverse selection* were not found to be mitigated through the case company's content elements. This is reasonable since *pipeline* has to be addressed by the male population and *adverse selection* by the individual's organizational structure, hence these could be mitigated by LDPs targeting both men and organizations as a whole. The case company is carrying out both these actions through an LDP aimed at men, as well as through an internal program customized for each organization. However, these business areas were not the focus of this thesis, which could explain the lack of these barriers being addressed through a particular content element.

The research findings are in line with Ely, Ibarra et al. (2011), stating the importance of connecting leadership development to invisible barriers to women's advancement, emphasizing the importance of not only including female individuals, but also male colleagues and organizational structures in order to achieve an actual impact. By addressing this successfully on all three levels (women, men, organization), it could thus be considered possible according to Noland, Moran et al. (2016) for companies to improve their profitability and performance. Currently, men possess the majority of organizational leadership positions, implying that in order to break barriers such as *adverse selection*, it becomes their responsibility to act. Further, to mitigate barriers such as *pipeline*, the organization itself must take action to achieve a change. It is therefore not only women themselves who ought to make an impact. However, an LDP as offered by the case company allows leaders to build knowledge and skills as well as confidence (DDI 2015; Boatman, Wellins et al. 2011), thus being the right forum to carry out the development of female and male autonomous thinkers with the ability to critically reflect upon their

own assumptions and frame of references regarding gender roles, professionally and personally. BDH could thus be considered to offer an LDP that promotes autonomous thinking through transformative learning, given that it successfully covers six out of ten content elements of importance from a gender perspective. This is essential in achieving a transformation in our pre-set ways of thinking and ultimately promotes gender equality (Mezirow 1997).

## 6.2 CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE

As earlier mentioned, this thesis has its starting point in the belief that men and women are born equal (Kovalainen 1990; Bartol 1978; Butterfield, Powell 1981) but imprinted differently throughout life by cultural stimuli (Knapton 2014), making gender roles a highly impacting aspect in our lives. On this note, how we are shaped as individuals, it was concluded that 76 percent of what contributes to a leader could be derived to learning, and only 24 percent to genetics. Concluding, our gender identities and how we form leaders is not pre-set and can thus be developed. As an effect of these gender imprints, barriers to female career advancement are formed (McKinsey & Company, Lean In 2015) which can be of both an internal and external nature. This can be seen in modern organizations' uneven split between men and women, particularly higher up in the hierarchies (Ely, Ibarra et al. 2011; Noland, Moran et al. 2016). This is discouraging considering that research shows the positive effect of diversity on firm performance and profitability (Noland, Moran et al. 2016). In order to address lack of diversity, autonomous thinking becomes all the more important, implying critical reflection of assumptions and frames of references (Mezirow 1997). LDPs allow leaders to do so by raising awareness, improve skills as well as confidence (DDI 2015; Boatman, Wellins et al. 2011), thus being the right forum to carry out the development of autonomous thinkers through transformative learning. This is essential in achieving a transformation in our pre-set ways of thinking and ultimately promotes gender equality (Mezirow 1997). Consequently, this would imply a potential equation where leadership development, which captures gender equality, could equal better firm performance in the long run.

The case company researched in this thesis effectively carries out an LDP which addresses six content elements found important in raising awareness and creating autonomously thinking leaders. However, if LDPs are an effective means of carrying out these content elements addressing gender equality, why are not more companies offering this? Potential reasons for this tendency could be that LDPs have too much other information that today's leaders are in need of, causing gender to be excluded from the program content. Another reason could be that organizations fail to realize the importance of gender equality due to lack of awareness about the impact of gender inequality on firm performance.

Further, organizations could also fail to recognize LDPs as a means of addressing this inequality, hence searching after other tools. However, individuals and organizations could also be of the opinion, or have the belief, that today's organizations are already "equal enough" and therefore compete under the same conditions. As previously mentioned, this view can be problematic considering that it is reasonable to assume that men and women encounter different barriers to their career advancement, thus requiring different tools in order to obtain awareness regarding mitigation techniques. Lastly, men are currently holding leadership positions and could therefore overlook women's barriers, resulting in employees not being sent to LDPs that address these barriers or realizing the need to offer this content when designing LDPs.

Further, if the case company has successfully been able to carry out this LDP for the last ten years, why is not a greater difference made already? Most likely this is due to the small scale of the program and the group capacity, only able to take on 12 participants per group, twice per year.

Further, it is necessary that the content elements of the LDP are able to address all of the barriers to female career advancement. However, as this thesis suggests, two of the barriers (*adverse selection, pipeline*) were not covered in the female LDP but could likely be considered covered through the male leadership program (*adverse selection*) and the internal customized program (*pipeline*). To achieve an impact on a greater scale, all barriers should be covered to a greater extent, and this should be done by a greater number of LDPs. The issue is thus the lack of companies offering LDPs with content covering the barriers to female career advancement, offered to women, men and organizations as a whole. Less this offering on the market, the prevailing *second-generation gender bias* is continuously reinforced and passed on to the third generation.

Gender roles are deeply imprinted in the cultural walls of organizations today, and since tearing them down completely is difficult since they make up the backbone of a company, LDPs addressing this to a greater extent could be a way to repaint them through transformative learning.

## 6.3 COMPLETION OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researchers found that the interviewees statements about barriers could be divided into 17 codes that were grouped into the 10 previously mentioned theoretically identified categories. One new barrier, *lack of female support*, was discovered in addition to those discovered in theory. This implies that all categories appeared to be relevant in the context of barriers to female career advancement and an additional barrier could be enriching the view on barriers while presenting an opportunity for future research to be conducted.

Regarding content elements, four themes were lacking empirically generated codes, and could there-

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fore not be found. These themes were *active contribution*, *noticeable improvement*, *participation in organization direction and culture* and *global outlook*. Within the other six themes, nine codes were mentioned and grouped into the eight theoretically identified categories. This implies that not all themes appeared to be relevant in the context of LDP content elements according to empirical findings conducted.

Further, the content elements of BDH were not found to mitigate the barriers *pipeline* and *adverse selection*. Figure 7 illustrates the completion of the theoretical framework by highlighting the additional barrier discovered through empirical results, the barriers, which were not mitigated through the content offered by BDH, as well as the four LDP content elements, which does not mitigate the barriers confirmed.

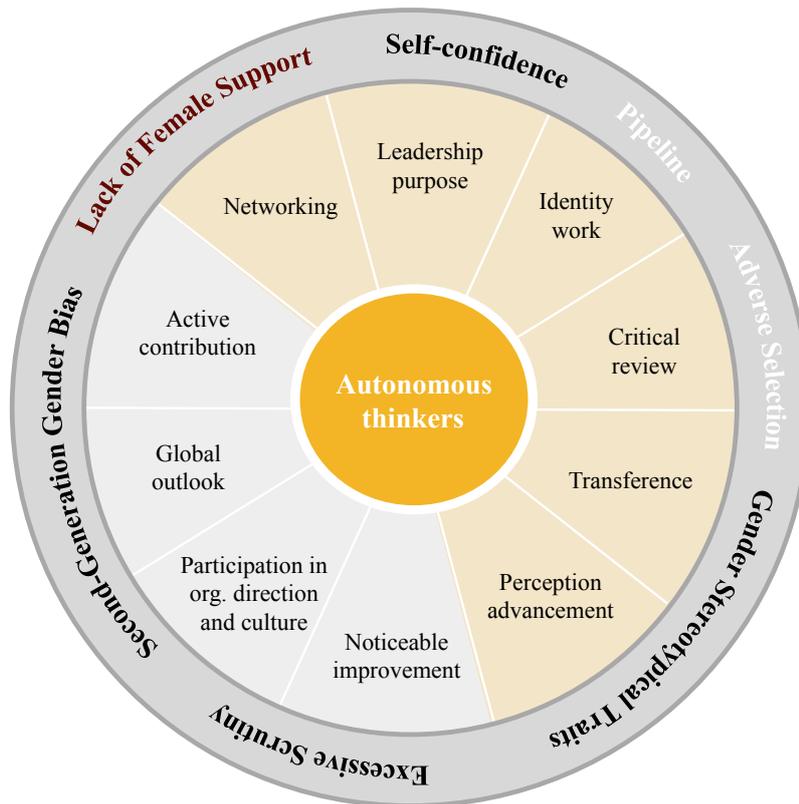


Figure 7: Completion of Theoretical Framework\*

\* Clarification of Figure 7: In order to achieve autonomous thinkers LDPs could, according to this research, include content elements referred to as *identity work*, *transference*, *perception advancement*, *networking*, *critical review* and *leadership purpose* (portrayed in beige) in order to mitigate barriers to female career advancement referred to as *self-confidence*, *gender stereotypical traits*, *excessive scrutiny*, *second-generation gender bias* (portrayed in black text) as well as the new finding *lack of female support* (portrayed in burgundy text). *Pipeline* and *adverse selection* were not found to be mitigated by the case company's LDP why they are portrayed in white text. Four content elements were not found to mitigate any barriers, referred to as *active contribution*, *global outlook*, *participation in organizational direction and culture* as well as *noticeable improvement* why they are portrayed in grey.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This section addresses the research questions (7.1), followed by the theoretical contribution (7.2), practical contribution (7.3), limitations (7.4) and finally future research (7.5).

### 7.1 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of the thesis was to empirically confirm the theoretically identified barriers, as experienced by women, to female career advancement and to discover how LDPs can mitigate these barriers. This objective was led by the research question:

*Which are the barriers women experience to female career advancement and how can these be mitigated by leadership development programs in order to ultimately contribute to increasing the amount of women in leadership position?*

Considering the theoretical and empirical findings analyzed through this thesis, the research question can be considered to have been answered. The barriers were discovered through theory, confirmed by interviews and developed with the help of women sharing their experiences. Further, through the researched case company, it was shown that LDPs can be a means of mitigating these barriers by offering content that raises awareness through transformative learning, which ultimately shapes autonomous thinking leaders. This is thus considered a key finding showing the importance of more LDPs addressing the issue of gender inequality in organizations in a similar manner.

### 7.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

By researching how the barriers to female career advancement and LDPs potential of being a means of mitigating these barriers, a foundation regarding the theoretical bridge between the two fields can be considered to have been formed, paving the way for further research. Potential areas, which could be of interest for future studies will be presented in future research (see Section 7.5).

### 7.3 PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

This thesis aimed to empirically confirm the theoretically identified barriers to female career advancement and to discover how LDPs can mitigate the same barriers, ultimately allowing them to have an impact on gender equality in organizations and society at large in the long run, by starting with the individual. Considering that this could be confirmed through the addressing of the research question in Section 7.1, LDPs with content elements addressing gender barriers can thus be considered a tool for gender equality. Further, the empirical relevance of this thesis from a societal perspective is considered high given the continuously low share of women holding leading positions, and the potential benefits organizations could draw from gender equality. Additionally, the result of this thesis could be considered useful for practitioners offering

LDPs in terms of support and inspiration on the elements to include when designing a program. Finally, the empirical finding regarding the importance of women supporting women is an aspect that could be captured by all organizations through internal female networks, but also by individuals through nurturing their female peers in their non-organizational settings as well.

### 7.4 LIMITATIONS

One limitation and aspect of criticism is that the barriers in this thesis are not mutually exclusive or collectively exhaustive, implying that they are interrelated and other barriers are highly likely to exist. Another limitation and aspect of criticism to this thesis is that it only regards the aspect of gender in diversity, when in the society at large, other aspects are in need of balance, such as ethnicity and sexual orientation. Therefore research is needed within these aspects as well to create complete balance in today's organizational arena. A third limitation is that the program offered by the case company could have attracted a certain type of women why the participant sampling could be biased from the beginning. A fourth limitation is that this thesis looks at the experiences of individuals and not to the organizational context they are situated in. Finally, considering that the research has been carried out in Sweden, the geographical scope is limited.

### 7.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

During the course of this thesis the researchers came across three interesting perspectives to explore. These perspectives emerged as the most important ones as they would broaden the understanding of how LDP content can mitigate barriers to female career advancement, thus promoting gender equality in the long run.

Firstly, since this thesis only highlights barriers to female career advancement it is of importance to also look at barriers men perceive and meet during their career advancement. An understanding of men's barriers deepens the general understanding for obstacles that individuals meet during their organizational life. Secondly, it is of importance to look into how these content elements should be packaged and assembled through exercises and activities in order to build a strong foundation and promote gender equality in the long run. This thesis can provide insight into the effectiveness of certain particular activities and if some activities are more efficient than others. Thirdly, it is also valuable to evaluate other leadership tools apart from programs, which could address gender equality and how these tools should be structured and used. This is of importance since not all organizations use LDPs as a tool in order to educate their employees, and

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even if they did, multiple tools would increase the chances of creating an organizational environment without gender differences, rather with a focus on the individual. Fourth, given the limit of geographical scope in this research, future studies could elaborate the varying views on gender equality in different cul-

tures. Finally, as an extension to this research it would be of interest to conduct a study on the correlation between specific LDP content elements and the barriers they mitigate respectively to obtain a more nuanced perspective.

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## APPENDIX 1 - PARTICIPANT SAMPLING

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Length of Interview</b>	<b>Interview type</b>
Head_1	Consulting	26-feb-16	74 min	Face-to-Face
Int_1	Real Estate	09-mar-16	40 min	Telephone
Ext_1	IT	10-mar-16	56 min	Telephone
Ext_2	Consulting	10-mar-16	42 min	Telephone
Int_2	Hospital	11-mar-16	30 min	Telephone
Int_3	Law enforcement	11-mar-16	41 min	Telephone
Int_4	Swedish Church	11-mar-16	45 min	Telephone
Int_5	Telecommunication	11-mar-16	33 min	Face-to-Face
Int_6	State agency	15-mar-16	40 min	Face-to-Face
Int_7	Hospital	15-mar-16	59 min	Telephone
Int_8	Hotel	15-mar-16	62 min	Telephone
Int_9	Aviation	16-mar-16	42 min	Telephone
Int_10	State agency	16-mar-16	33 min	Telephone
Int_11	State agency	21-mar-16	40 min	Telephone
Int_12	University	22-mar-16	43 min	Telephone
Int_13	IT	22-mar-16	56 min	Telephone
Int_14	Brewery	22-mar-16	35 min	Telephone
Head_2	Consulting	29-mar-16	53 min	Telephone
Int_15	University	31-mar-16	36 min	Telephone
Int_16	Consulting	01-apr-16	45 min	Telephone

APPENDIX 2 - DESCRIPTION OF CODES

Perspectives	Themes	Category	Code	Description	
Barriers	Self-confidence	Competence Underestimation	Lacking self-confidence	Lack of self-confidence as an obstacle to career development	
			High expectations	High expectations on women as a result of lacking self-confidence	
		New empirical finding, future research	Self-development	Self-development is important in strengthening self-confidence	
	Pipeline	Work-Life Balance	Work-life balance	Difficulties in balancing professional and personal life	
			Paternity leave	The importance of men taking care of children	
			Maternity leave	The difficulties associated with maternity leave	
	Adverse Selection	Homosociality	Homosociality	Men routinely choosing men over women	
			Leadership as Masculine	Feeling overlooked for being a woman	
	Gender stereotypical traits	Female Traits	Female stereotypes	The notion of the female stereotype	
			Stereotypically labeled	Being treated and acting according to gender stereotypes	
			Higher expectations	Higher expectations put upon women	
	Excessive Scrutiny	New empirical finding, future research	Outperformance	Higher expectations	The feeling of making a higher impact
			Visibility	Higher impact	
			Men can slide	Men being able to slide more easily	
	Leadership Development Content	Second-generation Gender Bias	Prevailing Structures	Traditions	Traditions reinforcing the prevailing inequality
Societal View				Equality in progress	Progress in gender equality is being made
Lack of female support		New empirical finding, future research	Female role models	The importance of having female role models	
			Women blocking women	Women blocking each other was said to be a difficulty	
Identity work		Self-knowledge	Self-development	Self-development as an important part of the LDP	
			Sense of identity	Strengthening one's sense of identity	
Active contribution		Reflection	Reflection	Reflection was an important part of the LDP	
			Content Description		
Transference		Observing Others	Learning from others	Learning from other women in the LDP	
			Realizing structures	Realizing the structures shaping gender inequality patterns	
Perception advancement	Reshaping Mindsets	Awareness	Gaining awareness as an element of LDP content		
		Content Description			
Noticeable improvement	Network	Content Description			
		Network value	The network gained through the LDP		
Critical review	Critical Reflection	Anchored in theory	The importance of the LDP being anchored in theory		
		Leadership vision	Developing a leadership vision through the LDP		
Leadership purpose	Anchoring				

APPENDIX 3 – ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS

		ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS																							
		Theory					Empirics																		
Perspectives	Themes	Category	Code	# of participants	Int_1	Int_2	Int_3	Int_4	Int_5	Int_6	Int_7	Int_8	Int_9	Int_10	Int_11	Int_12	Int_13	Int_14	Int_15	Int_16	Head_1	Head_2			
																					Head_1	Head_2			
Barriers	Self-confidence	Competence Underestimation	Lacking self-confidence	10	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X			X		X		
		New empirical finding, future research	High expectations	6		X	X	X	X																
			Self-development	3	X						X														
	Pipeline	Work-Life Balance	Work-life balance	7	X	X	X	X														X		X	
			Paternity leave	5		X																	X		X
			Maternity leave	3									X										X		
	Adverse Selection	Homosociality	Homosociality	10		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X								X		X	
			Leadership as Masculine	6			X	X	X	X	X	X													
	Gender stereotypical traits	Female Traits	Female Traits	9	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
			Outperformance	12	X	X					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
			Visibility	4							X												X		X
	Excessive Scrutiny	New empirical finding, future research	Men can slide	7	X	X	X	X	X			X			X										
			Second-generation Gender Bias	15	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Leadership Development Content	Lack of female support	Prevailing Structures	Traditions	6						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
				Societal View	11		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New empirical finding, future research				7	X	X						X				X									
Identity work		Self-knowledge	Women blocking women	5	X	X	X	X	X													X		X	
			Sense of identity	11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
			Reflection	3												X									
Active contribution		Observing Others	Content Description	-																					
			Learning from others	10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
			Realizing structures	3		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Perception advancement		Awareness	Avatariness	9	X						X														
			Content Description	-																					
			Network value	7						X															
Noticeable improvement		Network	Network	7					X																
			Network value	3	X																				
			Anchor in theory	3		X																			
Critical review	Critical Reflection	Anchor in theory	3	X																					
		Leadership vision	3			X																			

## APPENDIX 4 - INTERVIEW GUIDE: PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

### INTRODUCTION

As two master students in Business and Management at the Stockholm School of Economics, we have chosen to research the field of female leadership development for our master's thesis. This study is made in collaboration with Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB and will be made possible by conducting 18 interviews with female leaders throughout Sweden across several industries.

We therefore want to take part of your experiences and opinions regarding this topic. Your answers will be kept confidential, along with the company you are employed at.

#### BASIC INFORMATION

Name	_____
Age	_____
Company	_____
Industry	_____
Position	_____
Year of participation in the program	_____
Highest educational level	_____
Recent positions	_____
Company	_____
Position	_____
Tenure	_____

### A. BACKGROUND

1. Could you briefly tell us about your background?
  - Educationally (Where? Duration?)
  - Professionally (Where? Position? Duration?)
  - Other experiences, merits and competencies
2. Could you describe why you chose to participate in the leadership development program offered by Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Consultancy AB?
3. Do you have previous experience from leadership development programs?
  - Which program?
  - Could you describe your experience of it? (Positive? Negative? Improvements?)

**B. BARRIERS TO FEMALE CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

4. Considering your own experiences, could you describe how you have been treated as a woman in your professional life?
  - How do you think it may differ from how men have been treated?
5. Why do you think there are fewer women than men in leadership positions today?
  - Have you experienced this personally?
6. Have you been away from your work for a longer period of time?
  - Do you think it may have had an impact on your career?
7. Do you think leaders are chosen on the right bases?
  - If not, why? Own experiences regarding this?
8. Do you think the same expectations are the same for men and women regarding performance?
9. Do you think that you are more prone to having higher expectations on the performance of your male or female colleagues?
10. Do you think inequality between men and women in the work-place is a phenomena that is known?
  - By the organization? By the employees? By men? By women?
11. How would you consider your own self-confidence and self-esteem?
  - Has it always been this way?
  - Did anything affect it to the better or worse?
  - How do you think this relates to women in general?
12. How do you think gender equality has developed over the course of the last 10 years?
13. What do you think the gender equality will look like in the next 10 years?
14. Why do you think it is that even though we live in a society more equal than many others, with similar “formal” conditions for men and women, that there still are inequalities in organizational settings?

**C. CONTENT**

15. What do you think a leadership development program should contain?
16. Which are the greatest insights you have gained through the program held by Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Consultancy AB
  - Why these in particular?
17. Do you believe that leadership programs could have the potential to contribute to equality between men and women?
  - If so, how?

**D. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS**

18. What do you think is the key in creating equality?
19. Is there anything else you would like to add which we have not asked you about, that could be valuable for us to know about?

## APPENDIX 5 - INTERVIEW GUIDE: CASE COMPANY

### INTRODUCTION

As two master students in Business and Management at the Stockholm School of Economics, we have chosen to research the field of female leadership development for our master's thesis.

We therefore want to take part of the information regarding the company, the leadership development programs offered and how these are carried out.

#### BASIC INFORMATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Position \_\_\_\_\_  
Tenure at the company \_\_\_\_\_

### A. BACKGROUND

20. Could you briefly tell us about your background?
  - Educationally (Where? Duration?)
  - Professionally (Where? Position? Duration?)
  - Other experiences, merits and competencies
21. Could you describe why you chose to work for Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB?
22. Do you have previous experience from leadership development programs?
  - If yes, as a participant or provider?
  - Which program?
  - Could you describe your experience of it? (Positive? Negative? Improvements?)

### B. DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPANY

23. Could you tell us about Barbro Dahlbom-Hall Konsult AB?
  - What came to form the company?
  - What do you think separates your company from others in the industry?
    - i. Why?
  - What is the purpose of the leadership development program offered?
    - i. How do you work to reach your purpose?
    - ii. How do you view the results you are achieving?

**C. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

24. Could you describe the programs you are offering?
  - To whom are these programs offered?
  - Do you target individuals or entire departments of organizations?
  - Why?
25. How are the programs designed?
  - Modules
  - Principles regarding design
  - Group constellation
  - Format (such as classroom, 360 feedback, mentorship etc.)

**D. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM CONTENT**

26. Could you describe the content of the leadership development programs you are offering?
27. What is the program content based on?
  - Theories
  - Experience
  - Contextual analysis
28. How is the purpose of the leadership development program reflected in the content?

**E. EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAM**

29. Which insights do you wish the program to provide its participants with?
30. What results have you been able to see among the participants?
31. What feedback do you receive from the participants regarding the program and its impact?
  - Professional development
  - Personally
  - Organizationally
  - Does this vary between men and women who participated?
32. Is there anything else you would like to add which we have not asked you about, that could be valuable for us to know about?

**F. OTHER**

33. Do you think women are experiencing difficulties to climb the corporate ladder in organizations today?
  - Why do you think that is?
34. What would you consider essential in order to increase the share of women in leadership positions?