Are competitors with high heels more likely to win the business marathon in the new millennium?

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Abstract

‘Women are supposed to be in the kitchen and take care of the children while men earn the money and go “job-hunting”’. – Statements like this have been common in a lot of countries, cultures and families for many decades now. However, the world is constantly changing and so are the circumstances the two sexes live in. During the last 20 to 30 years there has been a drastic change concerning the newly opened possibilities for females to enter leadership positions. The questions that come to our mind immediately when hearing those readings are such as:

- What factors does a certain leadership style depend on?
- Could there also be other reasons beside the gender aspect why humans react in a certain way?
- What attributes and characteristics are required from today’s leaders?

Although there are many more questions that can be asked regarding this topic, the ones mentioned above, which make up the research questions of this study, seem to be the most important ones.

Following an inductive research process, empirical material was gathered through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. This collected information and the shared experiences are the representative data in this particular thesis from male and female leaders in different companies/organizations and various environments concentrating on our two home countries Sweden and Germany. Supported by a theoretical framework which consists of theories, books and articles of many well-known authors, especially the studies by the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the reader will get a wider knowledge of the empirical data.

A separate chapter about the depending leadership styles and the ‘condition-theory’ by Immanuel Kant will help to explain certain behaviours by male and female leaders as well as describe the reasons why our society sees the leaders’ characteristics the way it does. The conditions that are relevant in this thesis are about the attitudes, soft skills such as communication aspects, attributes being used to describe daily situations as well as personal features of current and future leaders in prospect of career chances and risks.

The following thesis aims for a clearer picture and greater awareness of particular settings and should be beneficial for current and future leaders from both sexes in all kinds of environments as well as
people who work together with leaders frequently to gain a better understanding of their behaviours and decisions.

Last, but not least there will be a part with a general review as well as personal reflections upon this topic and suggestions for further and future research areas besides the analysis of the whole thesis work.

Keyword(s)
Leadership, Management, Gender issues, Conditions, Globalization, Human behaviour, Communication
In this section we want to say thank you for all the encouraging, supportive, helpful and friendly comments and ideas that we received from so many during our entire thesis progress.

We are certain that most of you are already aware of how thankful we are for your assistance and support, however as G.B. Stern already said: “Silent gratitude isn’t much use to anyone!” (Quotation Garden, 2008-04-26)

Therefore we would like to mention some names of those who have become good mentors, friends and guides throughout the whole year and especially the last couple of months. Special thanks to the Head of the Programme Dr. Philippe Daudi, who has always been a great inspiration to us, as well as to our Course Professors Dr. Mikael Lundgren, Elisabet Idermark and Dr. Bertil Hultén, who provided us with a lot of good advice and knowledge along the way. Due to their spirit we were able to benefit in all categories of life and did not only learn about ‘hard facts’, but also trained our soft skills. These noble characters brought our academic background to a completely new and higher level. Without Terese Johansson and Daiva Balciunaite-Håkansson, who were the souls of the administration, we would have faced a lot of troubles. They handled all organizational aspects with great perfection while at the same time they always found the time to cheer us up with a friendly smile and encouraging comments.

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Kalmar, May 2008

Marie-Theresa Edbauer & Ida Svensson
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1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

In this chapter we are going to describe the problem as well as its background. We are going to discuss the importance of this topic, find out to whom it is relevant and formulate the research questions which will then guide us throughout the whole study. Finally we will clarify the purpose of the thesis and explain why we have decided on interviewing both male and female leaders from different environments in two countries: Sweden and Germany.

1.1 Background

There was a time when it was only the male gender who was occupying leading positions in this world, and when almost one hundred per cent of the jobs which implied a higher and more powerful status were represented by men. In those times women were supposed to stay at home and take care of the children and the households. As time passed by, circumstances and situations changed, developed and improved for the female population as women became more self-dependent and wanted to have their own careers. In today’s western world women are accepted as leaders, however, in some parts of the world there are still some cultural beliefs that men are the dominant sex and therefore women cannot be accepted as equals. Due to globalization aspects people interact with each other as well as exchange thoughts and beliefs between different groups and environments. The most common and widespread thought among people worldwide is that there are huge differences between male and female leadership styles, which therefore have a deep impact on decisions and performances. One big issue that the society might not have taken into consideration is that these assumed differences may also depend on other reasons such as age, background, culture or educations - just to mention a few examples.

1.2 The problem

We have now assessed the situation and circumstances that we are facing in our society today and thereby discovered that with extreme attitudes, behaviours and beliefs as we mentioned in the paragraph above, people - and especially the ones acting in a leadership role - have to deal with a lot of problems. There are doubtlessly a number of reasons why the common misunderstanding of reputed gender similarities and differences is still so strong among the population, however, one of the major issues that was revealed to us immediately during our research, and which is to some extent related to
all the other problematic aspects - such as the treatment of women and men in business life -, is the element of ‘conditions’. Basically all research problems that we were confronted with throughout the whole thesis study are connected to so called ‘conditions’, which the theorist Immanuel Kant had already pointed out at the end of the 18th century. In his work he explained that humans behave in different ways because of various conditions and that those conditions influence our everyday attitudes and approaches. We cannot resist those conditions as they are a part of our lives and they steer our reactions unconsciously. These conditions, of course, appear to a great extent in the leadership environment and ‘force’ leaders to behave the way they do. By means of interviews and theoretical research approaches we hope to identify the conditions in our society which lay down the possibilities for females to access leading positions.

Over the last years more and more attention has been called to the topic of female and gender leadership, which is why our research issue is of the uttermost importance. In many examples the research is about the apparent differences in the leadership styles between men and women depending on gender issues; however, we want to point out that the possible differences and similarities can also derive from different background factors like nationality, education, age, family traditions and so on. With the following project we are trying to find out whether this assumption is correct or rather not. This will be done with the help of different models, theories and examples which we have used throughout our whole study. The argumentation that problems in organizations, companies and environments etc. are due to gender differences is quite typical. As this explanation is the most obvious one for most people, that argument is supposed to be true, and other options, such as differences connected with a cultural and educational background, are unfortunately very often completely blocked out.

When we look at the term ‘leadership’ a bit closer, it becomes clear that the definition of the word ‘leader’ itself can lead to impressive misunderstanding and conflict. It is quite common that people do not bother too much about differentiating leaders and managers according to their environment, company, branch or country of origin, but omit those categories and generalize the term ‘leaders’ as describing persons who work on a higher management level. We want to point out that in our opinion exactly those differences have a great impact on certain situations in areas connected to gender aspects and should therefore be investigated and dealt with separately. Lumping all leadership styles and types together would be quite misleading and could steer researchers into the wrong direction.
1.3 Relevance and purpose of the study

This following study primarily tries to solve and prevent problems connected with the gender aspects of female and male leadership, while at the same time giving a possible explanation of the conditions mentioned and considering why and to what extent they really exist. Through pointing out and concentrating on certain ‘prejudices’ with regard to male and female leadership - which apparently exist because of certain assumptions within a society that there are actually similarities and differences between the sexes -, we want to make people from all countries and environments aware that particular behaviours are not merely determined by the gender, but rather by individual characteristics and other facts beside the sex issue. Reading and reflecting on our study should be helpful and encouraging for readers to open and broaden their views of how important the individual is as well as to reveal all the other aspects in leadership life that count besides ‘gender differences’. The whole thesis is meant to emphasize the fact that there is no such simple that of a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ sex for a leader in the business world. Very often people tend to simplify things as being either right or wrong which can lead to ‘prejudices’ and complications. With our contribution to the discussion about the question ‘which of the competitors (male or female) are more likely to win the business marathon in the new millennium’ we hope to neutralize those ‘prejudices’ and get rid of the misleading perspective that there are specific advantages and disadvantages of a gender as far as leadership is concerned.

Reflecting on leadership studies is not only useful for a small fragment of people, but for a huge audience. This point encouraged us even more to write about this issue as it does not focus on gender differences and similarities only, but rather on international and intercultural aspects. These are essential factors which increasingly attract the interest of many groups, especially at an age of globalization. Leadership has a very important psychological aspect which affects a broad audience. The reason for that is that it is highly connected with communication. In some way communication can cause problems in all branches and environments. This could happen through verbal or non-verbal communication. It is believed that women and men tend to react differently in certain circumstances, which then leads to a different outcome of the situation. With the help of our research work and individual interviews that provided us with ‘real life experiences’ we hope to give our readers a clearer picture of the different leadership styles and explain certain individual behaviours - which are
often interpreted as having to do with the gender -, in order to make life at work easier and to decrease communication boundaries.

As leadership itself is an issue in each and every environment, country, branch and department all over the business world, there is hardly any way to ignore this topic. Considering the increasing number of females in leadership positions as a result of globalization and past events that we have already mentioned earlier, it is obvious that humans, especially business people, cannot avoid dealing with this question. So, generally speaking the topic of this thesis is of great importance for the common knowledge of the general public in our times. However, as this subject is of greater interest for current and future leaders and in particular for female leaders, we are focusing mainly on these groups of people and hope to contribute to their knowledge and experience. This huge topic is still quite blurry and fuzzy and through this study we want to give present and future leaders a clearer picture and a better understanding of the current situation and of upcoming events. It hopefully encourages both male and female leaders to work together, respect and understand each other and strive for the best as a team.

1.3.1 For whom is the study relevant?

This research study is meant to be of interest and relevance for the following groups of people:

- People from all environments, sections and branches, who are already in leading positions, in order to gain more knowledge considering their individual situation and circumstances

- Persons who intend to apply for leading positions in the future as a useful tool for good preparation

- The public in general, as male and female leadership is a big and increasingly interesting issue in our time. (One example here could be the presidential election in the United States of America in 2008 in which Hilary Clinton runs for presidency - a very important and powerful leading position indeed!)
In addition we also research and write about this topic for our own purpose, as we both intend to find our way into the world of business and be two of the successful ‘competitors in high heels’.

And last, but not least we intend this study not only to be a help for current and future leaders, but also for employees and persons who work together with leaders and ‘bosses in order to give them a better understanding of their behaviors, attitudes and life styles.

So what was the reason for this study, who is our target group, what do we want to achieve? Our main purpose is to encourage people to consider and develop their leadership skills, while at the same time contributing some new and useful ideas to the theoretical and practical concept of leadership in general.

1.3.2 Relation of the study to fundamental issues:

Thus it is obvious that this study can be of use for many different people in different environments all over the world. It deals with a global issue that concentrates specifically on leaders and people who want to become leaders in the future. Companies, organizations and firms from all branches can benefit from the research and results presented in our thesis, which can then be passed on to everyone within the organizational structure. We can therefore say that there are no limits considering the relation of the study to fundamental issues; however, our main target group is current and future leaders.

This thesis is intended to be a contribution to a theoretical discussion, as extracts from it can be used as e.g. business articles or conference papers, as well as to the practical side of the world of business, as it gives concrete examples from economic reality, gathered by means of a questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. With this piece of work we want to make current and future leaders aware of certain situations and circumstances regarding leadership aspects in combination with gender issues. One of the main focal points is to
give both future female and male leaders as much information and knowledge about the research question as possible in order for them to be well prepared for their business lives.

As we mentioned in the last paragraph, this thesis is also meant to increase our own expertise and knowledge. It is therefore supposed to be a contribution to anybody, who is interested in the topic of leadership, but also to us personally as it affects the concept of our future lives.

An additional very important purpose of this thesis is to encourage people to reflect philosophically upon the importance and influence of the ‘conditions’ that affect our daily lives, behaviours and attitudes towards certain elements and circumstances. Already Immanuel Kant pointed out the massive impact the so-called ‘conditions’ have upon our way of thinking and with this thesis we want to consider and explain this fact and establish a connection between those conditions, leadership and gender issues.

1.4 Explanation of the problem

While researching the issue ‘gender leadership’, gathering empirical material and matching it to a theoretical background, we discovered that there is more to be considered than just the gender aspect. This thesis does not aim towards answering the question whether leadership is exercised differently by men and women, but rather finding out what factors the various leadership styles depend on. By means of practical and theoretical research we hope to find most (or at some) of the reasons why people react in a certain way and whether gender aspects play an important role in this context. This study, as already mentioned, affects a large audience and is therefore of interest for a lot of people. One reason of course why we chose this topic is our own personal background. First of all, as we are both women, we grew interested in female leadership styles and therefore gender aspects. Furthermore we are both studying economics and business administration; we have already gained a lot of intercultural and international knowledge from our teachers and fellow-students from other parts of the world and have also been confronted with different kinds of advantages and disadvantages in our academic education and practical work experiences.
For us it is important to make it quite clear to the reader that essentially the emphasis of our thesis lies on the general rather than the personal explanation of the problem. The reasons for this have already been explained before (paragraph 1.2, where we listed the problems arising in this research field). In addition to these arguments we personally believe that there is a need for a better understanding of the apparently ‘typical’ attitudes and characteristics of both male and female leaders. Taking into account the widespread opinions within our society, we will use a method which pictures and explains the ‘typical behaviours’ of both sexes with the help of the ‘conditions-theory’ by Immanuel Kant. We intend to prove that this method helps to achieve a better and easier frame of situations and circumstances, but we also want to point out that there are always and in any case exceptions and different views upon the issue. In order to explain the various leadership styles and the characteristics of the persons occupying higher positions within a company/organization, we sometimes have to get back to a general view of how people act, however using this way of visualizing the problem is just a means of increasing our knowledge of the leadership perspective. The same applies for the whole research work: Our main focus is on gender aspects concerning the management and leadership level.

1.5 Research questions

- What factors does a certain leadership style depend on?
- Could there also be other reasons beside the gender aspect why humans react in a certain way?
- What attributes and characteristics are required from today’s leaders?

1.6 Delimitation

It was necessary for this study to reduce the number of categories – which we used to divide our respondents into different groups as pointed out before – in order to stay within the time limit for our project as well as to gain the most accurate and real picture of certain circumstances related to gender leadership issues. We are aware of the fact that this field is suitable for a much more thorough
and wider research, which we will discuss in chapter six, making suggestions for future studies. Unfortunately there is hardly any possible way to keep track of all strings related to this topic at the same time; therefore we had to concentrate on those aspects that we considered the most important ones for our individual project.

The countries we have chosen to look at are Germany and Sweden. The reason for this choice is quite natural and obvious: Marie-Theresa comes from Germany and Ida is from Sweden; it was therefore very interesting for us to find out how leadership is exercised in our two home countries. In addition it was easier for us to find respondents for our interviews and questionnaires in those two countries. The different areas we investigated were administration, economy, politics and production. We decided to choose these specific areas since we think that with those categories we were able to cover a wide spectrum of leaders, so that they can fairly represent other leaders and give us a more common understanding about male and female leadership styles in general.

We started off with a rather wide range of investigation ‘fields’, which we then, after a fair amount of research, had to narrow down. At first we considered dividing the environments that we were planning to investigate even further to see whether leadership is exercised differently in traditional and modern companies. This of course would be interesting as well, but it is not really the purpose of our thesis. We want our study to be more general and decided for that reason to omit this part. Another idea that we discussed was to analyse different departments within diverse environments, for example to have a look into the administration, marketing and finance departments to see if there are major differences between the leadership styles there. That would of course have been an option as well, but, as we had agreed before, we wanted our thesis to be of a more general kind. For future studies these aspects might however become quite useful and will lead to further research work where we can then focus more deeply on the factors that we have now left aside. We believe our study to be more reliable and authentic because we asked general questions and then let the respondents of our chosen groups - representing leaders from different branches in the two countries Sweden and Germany – express and share their experiences and knowledge with us. One thing that we kept doing throughout the entire research phase was to interview both male and female leaders within the same categories to see both sides and to make sure that we get the most accurate answers from each and every group.
At the very beginning of our project we got a lot of different inputs regarding how we should approach the thesis. An idea that we received from one of our previous course professors teaching at the Master’s Programme of ‘Leadership and Management in International Context’ at the University of Kalmar, Sweden, was to see whether the behaviours of leaders are different depending on whether they have children or not. We considered this most appreciated idea, however decided that it did not fit into the research study that we were actually aiming at. In another study this would have been an interesting point, but in our current thesis this factor would only have caused even more confusion.

1.7 Disposal

Our approach to study the field we had chosen was to look at the various ‘leadership styles’ within different working environments. These working environments were areas varying from administration, economy and politics to production in both Germany and Sweden. This was done through a qualitative research study where we used a questionnaire which we had designed. The chapters have been divided as follows: In this first chapter we dealt with the background of the problem, the problem itself and the research questions as well as with the question for whom and why this study might be relevant. Furthermore we pointed out the limitations that had to be made as well as how and why this was done. In the following chapter there will be information about the literature we used and in what way we think it suited our study. In chapter three the subject of methodology and method will be brought up to inform the reader about the approach we selected for the thesis and how this was carried out. We will also have a critical look at our choice of method, explain why we think our approach was the most suitable for this study and what maybe could have been done differently. In chapter four the term ‘leadership’ will be defined, we will point out how leadership is expressed in theories and what we found out about the issue during our interviews with our respondents. This chapter together with the fifth chapter presents the main phenomena of leadership and explains how they are exercised by men and women. Within the fifth chapter, which contains some of the main prejudices that we found during our interviews, we will then explain what impact these prejudices have on leaders in today’s organizations. The last chapter, chapter six, is a summary/conclusion which will show the reader what we found out during our study and what we think the reasons for the results might be.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review chapter covers the theoretical field and context, explains what kind of literature has been used and why it was chosen. Furthermore, the chapter is going to contain an evaluation and criticism of the chosen literature; we will explain our selection of material as it is relevant for this study.

2.1 Relevant theories for the study

In order to be able to point out and explain the phenomena of leadership we used theories from some of the books we read in our Master’s Programme. The book *Strategy: Process, Content, Context. An International Perspective* by Bob De Wit and Ron Meyer gave us some further insights into the phenomena. We used *Intercultural Communication* by Everett M. Rogers and Thomas M. Steinfatt during the ‘Intercultural communication’ course. This book contains theories about different behaviours among people and we found it really useful for our study. The books *Personalgruppens psykologi* (which in English would be something like: The Psychology of the personnel group) by Rolf Garnér and *People skills – Your guide to salon success*, written by Robert Wright, provided us with theories about gender and people skills. *Könstrukturer i organisationer* (could be translated into: Gender structures in organizations) and *Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap* (the English title is: Men’s perceptions of women and management) by Anna Wahl contain good theories and information about female leaders in organizations and how they are experienced by their male colleagues. In addition we took the book *Leaders* by Warren Bennis and But Nanus into account. For the methodology chapter we used *Basics of Qualitative research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* by Anselm C. Strauss and Juliet Corbin, which was recommended by the head of the programme who was at the same time professor of the course strategy. To make the methodology chapter even more reliable, we used another source for it, namely the book *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder* (could be translated into: Business economical research-methods) by Alan Bryman and Emma Bell.

In addition to these books we used articles such as *Leader succession: does gender matter?* by David Dawley, James J. Hoffman and Alfred Redie Smith, *Finding gender advantage and disadvantage: Systematic research integration is the solution* and *The female leadership advantage: An evolution of the evidence* by Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, *A multilevel, complexity theory approach to understanding gender bias in leadership* by
Mary Hogue and Robert G. Lord as well as *Gendered heroes: male and female self-representations of executive identity* by Su Olsson as background information, but we did not quote from them. Our main theories however rely on the studies of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, especially his hypotheses about conditions which we have gained from his works *The Critiques of Pure Reason* and *What is Enlightenment?*, Anna Wahl’s books *Könstrukturer i organisationer* and *Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap* and Rolf Granér’s book *Personalgruppens psykologi*.

2.2 Evaluation and critique of the literature

As mentioned above, we have been working with literature used during our studies in the Master’s Programme. The books *Strategy: Process, Content, Context. An International Perspective* by Bob De Wit and Ron Meyer, *Intercultural Communication* by Everett M. Rogers and Thomas M. Steinfatt and *Leaders* by Warren Bennis and But Nanus were chosen for two reasons; first of all we found these books had the acquired theories we needed in order to explain and understand the empirical material we had gathered throughout the interviews. Secondly, since the thesis is part of our studies, we think it is of great importance to also include and use knowledge we already possess. These books were recommended by our teachers, therefore we think they could fairly be used as theoretical support for our study. Another source that was very useful for the theoretical part of our project was *Personalgruppens psykologi* by Rolf Garnér. This book was published in 1994, so at first sight it may seem a little old, but when taking a closer look at the empirical material we collected during our studies we found that the book still is of great relevance and backed up our results. Furthermore we used two books written by Anna Wahl, doctor of economics at the University of Stockholm, the first being *Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap*, which was a result of a study she made on behalf of the Swedish Government. It was written in 1994 and followed by another book called *Könstrukturer i organisationer* in 2003, in which she investigated the same 500 companies as in her previous study. Due to the information Dr. Wahl collected during her studies, we thought that both books were of importance for our study, they complement each other. The reason why we chose three Swedish books was that they describe Swedish leadership very well and, moreover, Wahl’s book *Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap* also deals with the examples of German leaders. Other literature that was used is *People skills – Your guide to salon success*, written by Robert Wright, doctor of philosophy. This book was published
in 1988 but is still used as lecture material for hair salons. It might seem a little odd that we chose this specific book, but it deals with different personalities which can easily be applied to any organization. In addition we used articles as background information, such as Leader succession: does gender matter? by David Dawley, James J. Hoffman and Alfred Redie Smith, Finding gender advantage and disadvantage: Systematic research integration is the solution and The female leadership advantage: An evolution of the evidence by Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, Female leadership advantage and disadvantage: Resolving the contradictions, also written by Alice H. Eagly, A multilevel, complexity theory approach to understanding gender bias in leadership by Mary Hogue and Robert G. Lord as well as Gendered heroes: male and female self-representations of executive identity by Su Olsson. Some of the information was collected from trustworthy internet pages, such as the theories of Immanuel Kant which we found on webpages where his work The Critiques of Pure Reason and What is Enlightenment were translated from the original German version into English. In addition to his texts we also collected interpretations from other philosophers and historians from different countries about this theory and compared their thoughts. This was necessary in order to get a good understanding of the hypotheses and the arguments by Immanuel Kant. Last, but not least the books Basics of Qualitative research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques by Anselm C. Strauss and Juliet Corbin and Företagskonomiska forskningsmetoder by Alan Bryman and Emma Bell must be mentioned. They provided us with the knowledge about methodology and methods. These books are used by teachers at our University when lecturing about methodology, and therefore we considered them appropriate for the study.

2.3 The conceptual framework

When writing a thesis about a particular topic and especially one that has recently been discussed by numerous experts from all kinds of areas, bringing in many controversial opinions, it is important to gather as much information as possible. The research method that we applied to this particular case was an inductive approach; first we collected empirical material and then evaluated it with the help of a matching theory. After that general reflections could be made and a conclusion could be drawn. Such an extensive and constantly relevant topic as ‘gender leadership’ can hardly ever be concluded and completely analysed, therefore it is necessary for researchers to make suggestions for further investigations.
The conceptual framework that we have been using in order to come up with representative results can be compared to a machine. It is a process of multiple stages that all lead to one another and without the previous step further steps cannot be made. This section of the thesis is used to explain the model and the concept that was used throughout our research.

At the beginning of our work (and therefore of the ‘machine’ mentioned above) we gathered information, collected thoughts and ideas, broadened our knowledge and made use of all kinds of resources. These inputs can be seen as a funnel. A funnel is an apparatus that is used to bring a wide spectrum of sources together and help to put it into a ‘box’. In our case the box was our own knowledge which we were able to enlarge with all the expertise and professional lore that we got from outside. As the thesis was following the inductive approach, the information that we gathered at the beginning was the empirical material. With the help of questionnaires and face-to-face interviews as well as observations of behaviours occurring on a daily life basis the input for the funnel was quite huge.

The next step after getting such a big amount of information on shared experiences and knowledge from both male and female leaders in various business environments was to pick the most important ones. This was a progress that needed a lot of sensibility and carefulness, as similarities and differences in the different answers had to be located. After noting all the background information such as age, sex, position within a company/organization and the business environment a person works from the more general part of the questionnaire, the specific answers expressing the thoughts and points of view of the interviewees had to be analysed. The pattern that we discovered during this process had then to be fitted into a theoretical framework.

The idea of a ‘funnel’, which we had used gathering the empirical material, was also applicable to the theoretical background of our study. In our courses and lectures we had already gained an immense amount of knowledge in the areas of leadership and international management. We were able to utilize many ideas and theories that we had been taught by our course professors and teachers throughout the entire programme. In addition to this basis we researched into various literary sources: books, articles and internet pages. Eventually we came across the theory about ‘conditions’ by the German Immanuel Kant. He was probably one of the greatest philosophers of all times and studied - among other things - the unconscious functions of our brain and mind. His philosophy matched perfectly
with the empirical material that we found. That is also the reason why we focused particularly and primarily on his hypothesis about the so-called ‘conditions’ and merely added further theoretical background knowledge to it. Being offered an extra chapter about the different ‘leadership styles’ before the main chapter deals with the conditions is of great advantage for the reader; he can thus comprehend both topic and arguments more easily.

Having matched the empirical material with the theoretical background, we were then able to get to the general reflections and the conclusion of our project. Both analysing and deliberating upon our results in comparison to the previous discoveries and opinions we published our own point of views upon this issue. Chapter six, where we sum up the research process and point out our thoughts, can be described as the outcome of our thesis. Topics like ‘gender leadership’ are probably going to be a big issue for future discussions in the business world, and we are confident that there are many more articles, books and reports to come. Their results may look different from ours or similar, however, we are sure to have contributed another input source for further studies. That is also the reason why we included additional suggestions and ideas that can be developed further on in the future in our chapter named ‘General reflections, conclusion and further studies’. The conceptual framework of our thesis can therefore be seen as a kind of ‘filter’, in which we collected a great amount of input information, matched the empirical material with the theoretical background and were then able to come up with an analysis: the outcome of our thesis.
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In this chapter we intend to describe the methodology and the methods we have used in our thesis as well as the reasons for choosing them. The chapter comprises our research strategy, techniques, empirical ground and theoretical field as well as method criticism and selection of the respondents.

3.1 The nature of the research question

When starting a research, such as the content of this master thesis, the topic can either be chosen as a result of personal or professional experience or because existing technical literature still shows unexplored areas that the researcher would like to cover (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). On the other hand, a topic can also be suggested by another person. We found out what we intended to investigate and do research about when we were confronted with some different themes that we could choose from at university. One of them was “female and gender leadership”. Since we are both on the master’s programme in “leadership and management”, we agreed that this would be a very interesting topic indeed, especially because it has attracted so much attention over the last couple of years. We decided to have a closer look at how leadership is exercised. The background of the problem can be read about in the first chapter, here we are only mentioning why we chose this topic in a methodical way. In order to be able to answer our questions, “What factors does a certain leadership style depend on?” , “Could there also be other reasons beside the gender aspect why humans react in a certain way?” and “What attributes and characteristics are required from today’s leaders?”, we decided on using a qualitative research model. We will explain the reason and the procedure more explicitly on the following pages.

3.2 Our approach

The topic “gender leadership” as presented in our study is a phenomenon which has been investigated by many, yet – in our opinion – not profoundly and extensively enough. We found out that most studies about gender leadership point out the differences between male and female leaders. This is not what we were aiming at, we rather wanted to have a closer look at how leadership is exercised by the leaders, and try to understand why people use different leading skills; in other words, we
intended to investigate the behaviour of leaders as well as the interaction between them. The methodical approach we chose for our study is a qualitative one. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) this research method can be used when trying to understand, uncover and get fresh information about what lies behind an almost uncovered phenomenon. Furthermore, the research method can be used for research about behaviour, interactive relationships and social movements, which is what we wanted to investigate into. Strauss and Corbin (1998) say there are different methods of qualitative research. Grounded theory is one of them and is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. There is an interrelated process between collecting data, for example through interviews, and analysing these data. In other words the theory develops during the research process. There will be more information about grounded theory in 3.4.

3.3 Our empirical ground

The knowledge about the phenomenon ‘leadership’ was obtained from leaders in different working environments. This was done by means of a qualitative research study, for which we used the questionnaire we had composed, and did face-to-face interviews which brought up a lot of interesting questions and answers. This technique, allowing the respondents to answer the questions freely and the researchers to ask new questions that can contribute to the study, is called ‘semi-structured interviews’ by Bryman and Bell (Bryman & Bell, 2003). When using this technique, there is no obligation to stick to the order of the questions, it can be changed in any convenient way. Through our interviews we hoped to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon that persons all over the world are facing: the existence of various similarities and differences between gender leadership styles. We made sure that were an equal number of male and female respondents from the areas ‘administration’, ‘economy’, ‘politics’ and ‘production’ in both Germany and Sweden.

3.3.1 The design of the questionnaire

The questionnaire has been divided into two parts, first the ‘general’ part where we asked the interviewees to write down their name, age, education and position within the company. By doing this we hoped to gain a better understanding whether the answers in the following
‘specific’ part might differ or be alike depending on what ages the respondents were, which education they had (not) had and within what kind of organizations they were active. In the ‘specific’ part the respondents were asked to describe what they think leadership is in general and how they would describe male and female leadership respectively. We asked them to write down some attributes that they connected to leadership and then relate them to either male or female leaders. Another question was about their contemporary view of leaders. Furthermore, we asked our respondents to rank attributes that they believed ‘similarities’ and ‘differences’ between male and female leaders depend on from one to seven (one being the most and seven the least important item). The given attributes they could choose from were ‘sex’, ‘age’, ‘social background’, ‘educational background’, ‘cultural background’ and ‘economical situation’. The interviewees were also given the opportunity to write down other attributes if they thought these could have an impact on differences or similarities between male and female leaders. What we wanted to find out with these questions were how leaders in different working environments looked upon leadership, to see if they had experienced any differences and similarities between the genders and to determine their reasons. As soon as new questions arose we asked them.

3.3.2 Pilot questionnaire

To make sure that the questionnaire we wanted to use was appropriate for this study, we asked some of our teachers to fill out the form and to let us know their opinion on how it was designed. We also asked them to contribute to our project by giving us some inputs concerning the presented questions as well as making suggestions for new questions. As a result of this ‘pilot survey’ some changes were made about the existing questionnaire and a number of new questions were added. We are very grateful for this help. Although a ‘pilot investigation’ like this was no assurance that the questionnaire would be as successful as we hoped it to be, we were at least able to improve and test it and thus became quite confident that, by using it with our actual respondents, we would get interesting information and a better understanding of the problem itself.
3.4 Grounded theory

The inductive strategy of gathering information that we aimed to use is, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), called grounded theory. It is a qualitative research wherein the empirical material dominates the theories which are used to demonstrate and to explain the phenomenon. At the beginning of the project work the only material available is the researchers’ pre-knowledge. After, by interviewing and observing, some information in the research field has been gathered, the material has to be analysed and coded. We used a qualitative instead of a quantitative approach for the analysis of our particular material due to the nature of the research. Since we were investigating individual behaviour it would have been difficult to analyse the data with statistical and mathematical equation. Another reason for choosing the qualitative approach had to do with the limit of time. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that a quantitative takes more time than a qualitative study. There are three major types of analysing and coding in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

3.5 Coding

Coding is another word for analysing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As mentioned above, there are, in grounded theory, three main types of coding which are used when working on material like this. After gathering information in a research field it is important to sort out what kind of information is of importance and what is not really relevant. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) coding is about breaking down data, conceptualizing and reusing this information in a new way. It is within this process that the data is transformed into theories. Coding also helps the researchers to break through biases and assumptions as well as provide the grounding, build the density and to develop the sensitivity of the research.

Open coding is the basic analytical step that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Without the open coding the rest of the analysis could not possibly take place. In this step data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for differences and similarities. Similar incidents and events are hereafter labeled and grouped into different categories; this can be done with a whole sentence, a
phrase or a single word. It is within this step that one’s own and others’ assumptions about the phenomenon is questioned or explored and can lead to new discoveries.

The second analytical step is the axial coding, in which the data, that has already been categorized and labeled, is put back together in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is done by making connections between a category and its subcategories. The phenomenon itself is the category and the specifying features that give the phenomenon precision, such as the context in which the phenomenon is embedded and the action strategies by which it is handled, managed and carried out as well as the consequences of those strategies, are altogether called subcategories. These two steps, the open coding and the axial coding, are used alternately.

After the categorizing and labeling of the phenomenon as well as putting data together in new ways, it is time for the third and final step, the selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding is the final integration of the categories into a grounded theory. Conscious choices about whom and what to sample have to be made, this is called discriminate sampling; what sites, persons and documents can help to maximize the opportunities for varying the story line of the thesis? Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend that the sampling should continue until theoretical saturation of each category is reached. To accomplish the final integration some steps have to be taken and not necessarily in a linear sequence. The first step to accomplish this integration is to formulate and commit to a story line; this is the conceptualizing of the study’s central phenomenon. This can be rather difficult since all phenomena can appear to be equally important. The next is about relating subsidiary categories around the core category by means of the paradigm, conditions, context, strategies and consequences. The third step entails relating categories at the dimension level, which means arrange and rearrange the categories until they seem to fit the story. In the fourth step those relationships are validated against data and in the fifth and final step categories that might need a further refinement or development are filled out.
3.6 Theoretical field and context

We intended to sort out and code the most important issues from our interviews, thus making them representative for the main chapters, four and five, throughout our thesis. The chapters themselves were filled with empirical material first, namely the data we gathered through the interviews and our own observations, and secondly with an analysis, including also the theoretical aspects of the matters. We used the technical literature, such as books and articles, as a supplementary validation of our findings, videlicet we referred to the literature where it seemed appropriate to make the study more trustworthy as well as to point out the differences of our study compared to actual literature. The non-technical literature, like newspapers and blogs, was meant to help us understand the phenomenon of leadership better and thereby formulate better and more adequate questions in our interviews.

3.7 Selection of respondents

Our respondents, who are active in different working areas both in Germany and Sweden, have been selected out of ‘convenient’ reasons. According to Bryman and Bell (2003) a convenient choice means that the researchers deliberately select persons who are available for them, at the same time competent and easy to reach. The reason for choosing the respondents we did was that we know them in one way or another, either personally or through others. As we come from Sweden and Germany, it seemed logical and easier from an organizational point of view to choose respondents from these two countries for our survey. Naturally we are personally interested in finding out how leadership is exercised in our home countries and how people there deal with any kind of problem that may be caused by the so-called ‘gender issue’.

We interviewed both male and female persons in leading positions from a variety of working environments – administration, economy, politics and production - in Sweden and Germany, as they were meant to be representatives of leaders in general. One of them – representing the area ‘administration’ – was the CEO of ICA Sweden AB; we had planned an interview with his female colleague as well, but unfortunately she couldn’t keep the date. Instead we talked to a lady who works as the chief translator for the German Government. Our representatives of the area ‘economy’ were one
male and one female manager at Swedbank, of the area ‘politics’ a female member of the EU Parliament. We tried to contact a male politician as well, but due to personal reasons he could not participate in our study. As far as the area ‘production’ was concerned, we had to concentrate on male interviewees; in spite of our efforts we could not to find a female leader there. All our respondents answered the questionnaire, and in addition to this we had face-to-face interviews with some of them.

3.8 Criticism of the method

According to Bryman and Bell (2003) method criticism is about judging a study. Lincoln and Guba introduced four alternative terms that can be used as criteria when judging a qualitative study and these are rephrased in Bryman & Bells’ book Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder. The terms they used are ‘reliability’, ‘transmitting’, ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘confirmation’. ‘Reliability’ means how reliable or likely the result is. ‘Transmitting’ aims to see whether these results could be applied in other contexts or not. When it comes to trustworthiness, the researchers have to ask themselves whether the result of the study could be the same again, or in fact the result could accidentally or coincidently have been modified. ‘Confirmation’ is the same as objectivity, making sure that the researchers have had control over their values so that they have not influenced the survey in any crucial way. According to Bryman and Bell (2003) Hammersley added another term to the already mentioned ones, namely ‘relevance’. The ‘relevance’ of the study depends on what it has contributed or could contribute to future studies within the same context.

Since ours is a qualitative study, we aim to use these five terms as criteria to criticise our methodology. We think the ‘reliability’ of our result is likely though we have only used sources that we consider as very reliable and all our respondents are well experienced in their surroundings. Even though we have used some older books, we still think they are relevant for this subject. In fact there have been no dramatic changes regarding this matter in the last couple of years, only small steps have been taken, if any at all. Since all situations are unique it is difficult to say whether the result could be ‘transmitted’ or not, but to a certain extent we think the result can be used as a base for further studies. Right now we think our study is ‘trustworthy’, i.e. if the same study would be done again, the result would probably be unchanged. The last criterion in our judgment is ‘confirming’; when it
comes to this, we consider ourselves to be neutral regarding the phenomenon of gender leadership. However, since we are both women someone could blame us for taking sides, but in fact we think we are rather open-minded and unprejudiced. As for the last criterion, the ‘relevance’ of our result, it is difficult for us to say whether we have contributed to some progress within this topic or not. We would however regard it as a satisfactory achievement if this study had contributed some ideas or impacts to an ongoing discussion and maybe induced people to be more open-minded.
4. LEADERSHIP STYLES

Within this fourth chapter we are going to describe leadership, both how it is exercised and seen in reality as well as how it is portrayed in literature. The various leadership styles are going to be looked at from both the masculine and the feminine point of view.

4.1 Common views of leadership

When asked to describe leadership, our respondents said it is about being supportive and helping people to improve. “Leadership is to lead and to get others to follow, to develop the employees. Other attributes are to achieve good results and motivate”; this was one of the statements that we received during our interviews (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Male). Another interviewee said “Leadership is about authority without being an authoritarian, to be the locomotive” (Sweden/Politics/Politician/Female). One of the explanations what ‘leadership’ is about was expressed through describing a ‘leader’ as the person who is responsible for the key functions in a company and who points out the visions, goals and values of the company and focuses and directs the employees in that direction (Germany/Production/Manager/Male). Since he is working for an American enterprise he compared how leaders in Germany/Central Europe and American leaders are looked upon: “There are obvious differences, in Europe the leaders are rarely seen as role models, they are judged by what they achieve and don’t achieve and are seen as someone who cares more about himself than the employees. The American part of the enterprise cherishes more the visionary and communicative style and the leaders are seen as heroes”. In one of the questionnaires we also received the answer that: “Leadership is to lead a company in such a way that it can stay successful and expand in the market in which it is active. Furthermore a leadership style should be chosen which aims for the well-being of the co-workers” (Germany/Production/Business manager/Male). During an interview with a representative from the ‘administration’ category we got the following respond: “I would say leadership is to help a group, or individuals, to develop their knowledge and to do a good job” (Sweden/Administration/CEO/Male). According to the respondents the most necessary attributes to become a successful leader are “to see the co-workers, involvement, to like the job and have fun” (Sweden/Politics/Politician/Female). For someone else it is: ”to be sharp and to lift others, motivate and engage, but the most important thing is to enjoy the job” (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female). Her male counterpart responded, “The most important attributes are to develop the co-workers, make results- both financial and
personal- and have the ability to motivate others” (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Male). One of the managers from the ‘production’ category also said:

“The attributes someone needs to become a good leader/manager is to be open for new influences, possess a certain hardness, personality, courage, positive charisma, an appealing smile, to be able to motivate the co-workers, to stand completely behind the company, to never be satisfied enough to stop striving for better, to be able to learn from mistakes and to be able to admit when he or she is wrong”. (Germany/Production/Business Manager /Male)

One of the other respondents named ‘listening’ as the most important quality: “There is a reason for why we have been given one mouth and two ears. (…) There must be a balance between the work and private life, and this goes for everyone (…) A good leader is someone who has made mistakes and learned from them” (Sweden/Administration/CEO/Male). Another business manager also described the weaknesses of leaders of today’s organizations:

“The managements of large companies today do not show their best side, the focus is on profits without consideration for the co-workers, for example when companies are overtaken by others they don’t care whether someone has been working for decades or not, if it is not profitable in the short run to keep him he will get dismissed.” (Germany/Production/Business Manager/Male)

Furthermore, we found out that the leaders themselves think involvement is the best way to keep their employees content, and in the long run this will also affect the results of the company. According to them happy and active co-workers perform a better job than those who are dissatisfied and unhappy. What we found out as well during the interviews was that the leadership style someone exercises depends on that particular person. Another factor for choosing a certain leadership style has to do with one’s own background and culture. If someone has been brought up by strong and authoritarian parents, he might go for the same style when he becomes a leader, or he may choose a totally different approach.

Within the organization theory it is common to talk about three different leadership styles: authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire leadership (Ledarskap, 2008-04-15). Authoritarian leadership means that the leader rules the organization with an iron hand and has difficulty to handle disagreements. The authoritarian leader regulates the activity in detail and makes all decisions himself/herself
without asking the other group members (Granér, 1994). The democratic leadership is the opposite; this leadership style is characterized by the group members’ active participation in planning and implementation. The leader’s role is about being there for advice and help as well as active collaboration with the group members and stimulating the communication within the group. The third and last leadership style is called ‘laissez-faire’, which means that the leader carries out a passive leadership and contributes very little to the remaining group’s work. Instead, information and responsibilities are left to the employees. This leader acts only when he or she is asked to do so.

4.2 Masculine and feminine leadership

In order to be able to compare the genders we asked the respondents to describe their views of female and male leadership.

“There are differences between men and women, we should be aware of that, but women can have masculine leadership skills as well as men can use female attributes. Therefore it is difficult to compare male and female leadership. But I know for sure that, in order to establish a successful company, there should be both men and women in the leading positions. Women think and do things differently from they are more interested in factors beyond the exterior while men are more direct. For them there is either right or wrong, black or white. This is one of the reasons why I think a both male and female way of thinking is necessary.” (Sweden/Administration/CEO/Male)

In addition to this the CEO also mentioned that men are faster than women when it comes to making a decision. Looking at the figure below that he used when explaining this, we see that men make decisions rather fast, but before implementing them they make a new and adjusted decision. He claims that women discuss things for a longer period before coming up with a decision, but as soon as they have made one they start to implement it and stick to it. In his opinion the reason for this is that men are naturally more risk-taking and therefore use a faster decision-making system. Women tend to discuss things for a long period, trying to look at them from various points of view, but once they have made a decision, they implement it (Sweden/Administration/CEO/Male).
Asked for his opinion on the same issue, one manager working in the ‘economy’ category said: “Men and women are more equal in working life today. I think only the old generation has a problem with this issue.” He added: “Women are more accurate and they are softer. Men are pointing with the whole hand and they are less detailed than women.” He also mentioned the habit of back-slapping among men, and that it is only used when no women are present (Sweden/Economy/Manger/Male). His female counterpart first said that she did not think there were any differences at all, but after some consideration she added: “Well, maybe the language, women have another way of talking and people are do not always listen to them. Women demand more from themselves and they set their own limitations, they do not trust other women, nor do they support each other.” In addition to this she said that women often give priority to their families instead of their job. If there are women who let the career come first, then other women think this is wrong and look upon them as irresponsible parents, but this would never happen to a man (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female). The business manager of a German building company said, “When it comes to female leadership, decisions are made with feeling and understanding, usually in this order. Men on the other hand make their decision in the opposite way, the understanding comes first and then the feeling” (Germany/Production/Manager/Male). A politician commented on the same issue: “Women are warmer and softer in their leadership style, they care about other people while male leaders are more interested in the leading itself than in everything around - they don’t really care if people are following or not” (Sweden/Politics/Politician/Female). Another business manager within the ‘production’ category said: “The female style of leadership can in certain phases seem harder than the male, because women have to prove more to be accepted. Nevertheless, I think women have more social competence than their male colleagues” (Germany/Production/Business Manager/Male). He described male leaders as less social than the female
leaders, and he said that men do not usually care about the private lives of the co-workers. What we also found out when asking about female respectively male leadership was that men tend to use more difficult words in their conversations than women do. When we asked for a reason, two female interviewees answered almost the same, namely that they think the reason for this is that men want to give the impression of being better than they actually are (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female and Sweden/Politics/Politician/Female).

According to Rolf Granér there are general scattered attitudes which make men and women function differently (Granér, 1994). Those attitudes are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male properties:</th>
<th>Female properties:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boundary way spirit</td>
<td>Cross-border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result oriented</td>
<td>Relation oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on competition</td>
<td>Cooperativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrained</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigating</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td>Soft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>Careful</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Figure 2: Gender scattered attitudes, Granér 1994, p.122)

In the working life men are considered to set tasks before relationships and to take on more work aimed role functions, while women prefer social roles. Women are considered to have the ability to do several things simultaneously, while men concentrate on one task at a time. Women are more likely to see the whole project while men rather focus on one part at a time. Irrespective of how much this reflects a reality in a sociological perspective, the difference is not as obvious when we look at the individual. There are certainly men who agree with female qualities, as well as there are women who agree with male attitudes. Moreover, many men and women have both types of properties at their disposal and therefore the ability to choose a male or a female perspective, depending on the situation. We will, in the following chapter, look closer at these attributes and see if they are connected with the gender or if they depend on the leaders themselves.
4.3 Summary of the chapter

After a theoretical approach towards a definition of the term 'leadership' and its various styles (authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire), we have made an attempt of finding out how it is exercised in today’s reality.

It is of course impossible for us to say which leadership styles our respondents have chosen themselves, as we only saw them during the short time of our interviews, but if we understood them correctly, the leadership style someone chooses is more influenced by his/her background and age than the gender.

During our interviews leaders were described as persons who run a company in a beneficial way and point out its goals, visions and missions. Someone said that leadership could be described as being the ‘locomotive’ within a company. It is also about motivating, guiding and helping the co-workers to become better, being a role model and being able to listen to others. Nevertheless, it is of great importance that the co-workers are involved in the planning and implementation phases.

Male leaders are generally described as harder and more focused on results than women, they express their opinion quite frankly and are more direct. Female leadership involves sensitivity, softness and caring as well as multitasking abilities. However, women tend to be non-supportive when it comes to other women, just as if they would not like them to be successful. One of the reasons for this might be that they are jealous of others who dare to fight for higher positions. Men on the other hand do a lot of ‘backslapping’ and favour other men instead of women. For example they would rather choose a man to fill a vacant position – not because they think a woman is less suitable for the job, but because they think it is easier for them to get on with another man. There are differences between men and women in general, there is no doubt about that, but when it comes to the ability of running a company and being a leader, the differences are almost invisible. Some attributes were described as typically male in our interviews, for example focusing on one thing at a time, others were said to be typically female, for example sensitivity, but it also became quite clear that many men use ‘female attributes’ and there are likewise women who exercise a so-called ‘male leadership style’. Therefore it is almost impossible to draw a clear distinction between the genders as far as their ‘typical’ skills are concerned.
Since we got similar answers from all our respondents, irrespective of country, organization, age or sex, we believe they represent the common view of leaders in today’s German and Swedish companies.
5. CONDITIONS

In the following chapter we are combining the empirical material that we have gained through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with the theoretical background. Six of the main ‘prejudices’ – or rather ‘conditions’ as we are going to refer to them – are described in more detail.

5.1 Empirical Material

Using the inductive method for our thesis, we started by doing actual field research. A carefully developed questionnaire with a general part about the background of our interviewees (enquiring about sex, age, education/title and the position within the company), as well as a more specified part concerning the individual thoughts and opinions about male and female leadership helped us to analyse and understand the current situation among leaders. In the specialist part we asked our respondents to rank different influences that may affect leaders of both sexes according to a scale indicating their importance. Throughout our work with the questionnaire and the interviews we had with male and female leaders from different companies/organizations in various environments we discovered that some aspects were mentioned in almost all of our discussions. As our interviewees shared their experiences with us, delineating stories that occurred in their own careers and their companies, our attention was increasingly drawn towards those aspects. Although the interviewed leaders had different stories in mind, reflected upon our topic from changing angles and gave different examples while answering the same questions from our survey, we discovered a certain pattern. With this pattern we were able to locate the ‘prejudices’ in our society - as our respondents called them - which were pointed out the most. At this point it is necessary to mention that these ‘prejudices’ were not described by one gender only, but by both sides; male and female leaders observed such ‘prejudices’ about their own sex and about the opposite gender. According to the majority of our interviewed leaders they usually come from the so-called stereotypes that humans have in their minds when evaluating male and female characteristics. The terms ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female attributes’ were very often used. This proves that stereotypes create a certain understanding of groups, usually expressing an exaggerated behaviour. This kind of generalization and categorizing might cause prejudices as well as cultural clashes and understanding problems. As Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt point out in their book Intercultural Communication “stereotypes are generalizations about some group of
people that oversimplify reality” (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 76). They also claim that “such generalizations prevent accurate perception of the qualities of unalike others” (Ibid, p. 76). Although those stereotypes might help to categorize people and are often recognised as non-realistic and funny exaggerations, they can also support false impressions and in the worst case lead to prejudices, discrimination and racism. Stereotypes are known to “act like codes that give audiences a quick, common understanding of a person or group of people—usually relating to their class, ethnicity or racial, gender, sexual orientation, social role or occupation” (Media stereotyping - Introduction, 2008-01-03). The reason why humans tend to use stereotypes is that those “standardized mental pictures held in common by members of a group make it easier to decide what behaviour is appropriate and what behaviour to expect” (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 229). Especially in the international business world where persons from different countries and cultures are daily confronted with each other, it is important for people in leading positions to understand typical behaviours and life styles, but also to be aware that certain stereotypes can be exaggerations and that every individual is special and handles situations in a different way.

The term ‘prejudices’ can be quite misleading as it is very hard to define where preconceptions start and where stereotypes end; therefore we decided to adapt Immanuel Kant’s theory about ‘conditions’. As the term ‘prejudice’ reflects a disadvantage and implies a negative view of the person or object it is aimed at in most contexts, we decided to use the term ‘condition’ when describing the results of our research. Our insights match perfectly with Kant’s scientific concept. That is why we decided to use the term ‘conditions’ rather than the expression ‘prejudices’ and to keep Kant’s concept as our theoretical background in mind when – on the next pages - describing and analysing the results that we obtained from our empirical material, namely six main ‘conditions’ that were most frequently mentioned in our interviews. So what is Kant’s theory about?
5.2 Theoretical Background

Why do we react in the ways we do? Why do we see and look upon certain situations, circumstances, objects and persons the way we do? These kind of questions appear quite simple at first sight, however Immanuel Kant, one of the most important and well-known German philosophers, who lived from April 1724 to February 1804, established the theory that the way people think is controlled by those so-called ‘conditions’, which are anchored somewhere in our mind. He spent years of research upon his theory that humans do not have a radical control over how they portray pictures, analyse behaviours or examine various settings. In his collected works we can find his masterpiece, *The critical philosophy*, it says that

> ‘With regard to knowledge, Kant argued that the rational order of the world as known by science could never be accounted for merely by the fortuitous accumulation of sense perceptions. It was instead the product of the rule-based activity of "synthesis."’ (Immanuel Kant, 2008-03-14)

Not being able to think rational as our mind is already set and even more extreme not being able to behave and act the way we want to as these ‘conditions’ steer and control our feelings, opinions and our body, might be a bit too harsh and strong in this context. The theories by Immanuel Kant, however, discuss the fact that we are somehow influenced by those ‘conditions’ and therefore biased.

> ‘Kant said that philosophy’s proper enquiry is not about what is out there in reality, but rather about the character and foundations of experience itself. We must first judge how human reason works, and within what limits, so that we can afterwards correctly apply it to sense experience and determine whether it can be applied at all to metaphysical objects.’ (Critical philosophy, 2008-03-15)

In his work ‘*The Critique of Pure Reason*’ Immanuel Kant stated that the human mind is influenced by ‘conditions’ that have existed for a long time in our society and that have their roots deep in our cognition. These conditions influence our daily behaviours and beliefs unconsciously, and even though we might experience something different our thoughts are preoccupied by those conditions. In other words:
Kant maintains that our understanding of the external world has its foundations not merely in experience, but in both experience and a priori concepts, thus offering a non-empiricist critique of rationalist philosophy, which is what he and others referred to as his "Copernican revolution." (Immanuel Kant; 2008-03-14)

This theory is contentious and many other theorists have expressed different opinions which state that the human mind is free from predominated thoughts. Kant’s theory, however, suits this research study best as during our empirical material phase - when we collected statements and opinions from people who take an active part in the world of work and business - our respondents described their feelings towards ‘gender leadership’.

Many of our interviewees explained that certain pictures are engraved into their minds, and that - even though there are exceptions on both sides - the main attributes which characterise women and men can be named easily. That made us realize that somewhere, rooted deep inside our consciousness, must be a ‘source’ which makes different people in various environments or even countries use almost the same expressions. Therefore we decided to take Immanuel Kant’s theory as our basic reference and applied the following ‘conditions’ to sentences like this:

“Kant […] speaks of the thing in itself or transcendental object as a product of the (human) understanding as it attempts to conceive of objects in abstraction from the conditions of sensibility”. (Immanuel Kant; 2008-03-14)

Kant claims that there are certain influences which make it impossible for a person to change his individual beliefs and thoughts. Experiences that happened to the human species in the past can be passed on to the next generations. Many of these ‘conditions' are not realized clearly and their existence is sometimes denied by men and women as they usually appear subconsciously.

The following quotation describes this theory more precisely:

“Nevertheless, his theses -- that the mind itself necessarily makes a constitutive contribution to its knowledge, that this contribution is transcendental rather than psychological, that philosophy involves self-critical activity, that morality is rooted in human freedom, and that to act autonomously is to act according to rational moral principles -- have all had a lasting effect on subsequent philosophy”. (Immanuel Kant; 2008-03-14)

Immanuel Kant not only discusses this phenomenon in 'The Critiques of Pure Reason', but also in his study called 'What is Enlightenment?’ where he tries to answer exactly this question. He starts the text
with the following paragraph: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!” (Immanuel Kant; What is Enlightenment, 2008-05-30). Many great philosophers and experts in that area have analysed and reflected upon this topic and the theory by Immanuel Kant and so did Michel Foucault in 1978, who was a French philosopher, historian, critic and sociologist. In Foucault’s point of view it is necessary to see the connection between those two master pieces by Kant which he formulated like this:

“Nevertheless, notwithstanding its circumstantial nature, and without intending to give it an exaggerated place in Kant’s work, I believe that it is necessary to stress the connection that exists between this brief article and the three Critiques. Kant in fact describes Enlightenment as the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority; now it is precisely at this moment that the critique is necessary, since its role is that of defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped. Illegitimate uses of reason are what give rise to dogmatism and heteronomy, along with illusion; on the other hand, it is when the legitimate use of reason has been clearly defined in its principles that its autonomy can be assured. The critique is, in a sense, the handbook of reason that has grown up in Enlightenment; and, conversely, the Enlightenment is the age of the critique.”(What is Enlightenment?, 2008.05-30)

Using the theory about ‘enlightenment’ and therefore Kant’s studies about ‘conditions’ confronted us with the question whether the human mind is set due to those ‘conditions’ or whether it is the other way around which means that we are creating those ‘conditions’. Which of those aspects was established first and which one is the outcome? Asking ourselves in which order we have to put those two features, we figured that one leads to another. It can be seen as a vicious circle where the ‘conditions’ could not exist without the preset human mind and where the human mind would not be influenced without the ‘conditions’. Another interesting question which arose during the research phase was whether the ‘conditions’ might not neutralise the ‘prejudices’ instead of creating them. Analysing a sensitive topic such as ‘gender leadership’ with the help of powerful and intensive theories like the ones from Immanuel Kant it is important to see the other side as well. In this case it is the fact that the existence of ‘conditions’ could not only be seen in a ‘negative’ way to explain certain behaviours by men and women. It might be true that due to those ‘conditions’ both sexes might be treated or treat each other differently, however, it could also be the other way around which means that there are already existing ‘prejudices’ in our soci-
ety which can be neutralised through the ‘conditions’ that influence the human mind.

On the next pages we are going to point out the six main ‘conditions’ that we discovered through comparison of our empirical material with the theoretical framework, and finally we will summarize these results in an additional chapter, give general reflections on the subject and conclude this article, also mentioning some suggestions for further research studies.
5.2.1 Are women more organized and detailed than men?

Why do leaders from both sexes rather employ female than male secretaries? How come there are far more women at the front desks and behind counters, for example at libraries, hospitals, dentists, universities or even supermarkets? Is it just a coincidence that in most administrative positions the female gender dominates? There is no doubt that all of these randomly picked examples could merely be exceptions, however statements such as the following are not atypical:

Is there a plausible reason why most secretaries in all sorts of businesses and organisations are female? Is it just a coincidence that - no matter which airline - the majority of the flight attendants are women rather then men? Though the correlation between these questions and our topic may not appear obvious at first sight, it becomes clear when we take a closer look and watch scenes from everyday life more carefully. When we asked some of the leaders who work in banks in our face-to-face interviews whether there was a good explanation why more than 90% of the employees at the front desks and the service counters are women, they replied almost unanimously:

‘Women see other things than men, have another feeling for details (…) sense other people, have a female intuition (…) they are more accurate as well as more detailed.’ (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female)

One particular aspect that has often been discussed and argued about is the assumption that in general women are better than their male colleagues when it comes to fulfilling many tasks at the same time. This ‘Multi-Tasking’ ability has been analysed in a lot of books by different authors. Although there is no doubt that there have always been and will always be exceptions to the rule, statements such as the following are quite common:

‘Women are considered to have the ability to do several things simultaneous, while men concentrate on one task at the time. Women have easier to see wholes and men focuses on parts!’ (Granér, 1994, p. 122).
Another issue that arises from time to time when gender aspects are being discussed, is the different use of language of either men or women. Is it true that women use far more words per day than men? There have been different answers to this question, verified by different numbers and figures. Of course there is no actual proof that this statement is correct, but it is well worth considering when we talk about ‘gender leadership’.

“The most recent to join the chorus is Dr. Louann Brizendine, clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco. In her current best-seller, ‘The Female Brain’ (Morgan Road), Brizendine tells us that "A woman uses about 20,000 words per day while a man uses about 7,000."" (Sex on the brain; 2008-04-15)

When asked what attributes came to their minds concerning ‘female leadership’, our respondents also mentioned the use of language:

Maybe the language, women have another way of talking. (…) men use difficult words in their conversations.
(Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female)

In his book “Personalgruppens psykologi: Manligt och kvinnligt” Rolf Granér stated that there are general scattered attitudes causing men and women to function differently. He chose the following attributes to describe female behaviour: ‘emotional, caring, soft, understanding, and careful’ (Granér, 1994). Is this the reason why women rather take on jobs in which they can help and support people and get in contact with customers in face-to-face situations? This question also arose during our interviews, and the answer was that this kind of behaviour strongly influences women’s decisions when they choose their professions and work places.

What conclusion can we as observers and readers draw from these discoveries? Of course they are no simple explanation why we behave the way we do, they could, however, make us aware of the fact that there is more than only one ‘string’ that pulls and pushes our mind into one or the other direction. According to Immanuel Kant’s theory about ‘conditions’, the belief that women are more organized and detailed than men is fixed within our minds and can be traced back to previous experiences. It is assumed that due to the fact that especially in the past women had to take care of the children and the household as well as collect fruits etc., they had to develop certain skills to make sure that all those strings got pulled at the same time. Statements like ‘women are more accurate and put more emphasis on the organizing
aspect’ are quite common and very often even used in funny contexts or jokes by both men and women. Very often men use this ‘condition’ as an excuse, for example when they have forgotten their wedding anniversary or their wife’s birthday. Sometimes we get the impression that a ‘condition’ like this is quite handy and useful when needed. Is it therefore only an explanation and excuse for certain behaviours? Do we feel more secure if we know the ‘reason(s)’ for our actions, because we cannot stand the uncertainty? It is up to the reader to consider this thought and find a plausible answer.
5.2.2 Are men more direct?

When we asked our respondents to describe female and male leaders respectively, they came up with rather much the same answers. Both women and men claimed in our interviews that female leaders tend to ‘wrap in’ the conversation and are more talkative than their male counterparts. The general assertion is that male leaders express their feelings quite clearly and are not afraid of telling inconvenient truths, criticizing others and expressing their opinions frankly and without hesitation in front of a whole group of people. A woman in the same situation would prefer a private talk with the person concerned. Moreover, men tend to use more difficult words when talking to their employees while women want to make everybody understand and thus prefer a more common language. If someone does not perform as well as he/she should or is not behaving in a proper way, male leaders would probably tell this person to leave, while a female leader would rather try to find out the reasons for this ‘misconduct’ and give the person a second chance.

Maybe the assumption that men in general are more direct is based on the fact that they are not as talkative as their female counterparts. While women use a lot of words to explain something, men usually confine themselves to the essentials in order to say the same thing. Are women more afraid of conflicts and therefore try to avoid them by having longer and more personal conversations, smoothened up with nice words and long explanations which make the content clearer and easier to understand? Maybe this is – among other possible explanations – the reason why men are generally regarded as being more direct.

In order to find out if this ‘condition’ really exists, it is essential to have a clear notion of what a leader’s tasks really are. Although there are various opinions on this matter and it is hard to define his/her duties exactly, we will try to describe them as clearly as possible, keeping in mind both our empirical data and the theoretical background.
One of these tasks, for instance, is calling the employees’ attention to certain issues, for example a competitor, a product-line or consumer preferences. In order to point out the importance of those factors, the leader could either use some kind of action or give a few statements. Tools that can be used for this purpose include: naming, labelling, giving direct orders or symbolism through explicit behaviour. Leaders have to create meaning with the help of their ‘frame of reference’. In order to impart this meaning to his employees, he needs to offer them cues (present events), frames of reference (past events), and a connection between them.

Communication is the most important and necessary feature for the leader to pass his/her opinion on to the employees of the company, it is, however, at the same time the element where most problems can originate. The more levels a company has, the more departments and offices an order or vision has to pass on its way to the person(s) it concerns. During that time its actual meaning might be modified and altered so that in the end, when it reaches the staff, it can easily be misunderstood. Isn’t – with regard to this problem - directness the best option to make sure that the original meaning of the order is passed on?

Another argument that has to be considered is that leadership is about the interaction of leaders and followers. Leaders cannot perform their tasks without the support of the company’s staff. It is on the contrary a process, in which two parties have to be involved in order to be successful. Obviously leaders have to make sure that they use their frames of reference wisely and pass the ‘meaning’ on by using a suitable tool, but on the other hand the followers have to be willing to receive those meanings and accept them. In many cases people tend to dislike direct orders, as they limit their own responsibility and creativity. Keeping this in mind and taking into account the fact that employees and leaders have to cooperate in order to run a business successfully, could the indirect way with deep and long discussions where everybody has a say and can contribute one’s opinion, be the more preferable one?
Terms such as “draw pictures, build a model, mock up, metaphor, comparison, analogy, bring subjects to life, synaesthesia, experiential references, presentation, symbol and verbal imagery” (Bennis & Nanus, 2003, p. 31-36), used to describe ways of communicating things to each other, are all indicators that show how important this very communication within a company and with external factors is.

Communicating enables participants within the same environment to establish a better and easier way of living together as “all organizations depend on the existence of shared meanings and interpretations of reality, which facilitate coordinated action” (Ibid., p.37). It is not a matter how organizations and leaders communicate with each other, but rather that they communicate at all, as “communication creates meaning for people” (Ibid., p. 40). Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus base the social architecture system on the communication foundation. This is a structure that helps leaders to establish a better ambience as employees feel much more related to the company, they want to pull at the same side of the rope, and their actions and work steps can be controlled a lot more easily as shared guidelines exist.

Communication in a verbal and non-verbal sense could therefore happen in either a direct or an indirect way. Looking at the points we have made so far, it is obvious that both behaviours have their advantages and disadvantages. There is no proof that this ‘condition’ - which says that men are more direct - is true at all, however, this so-called ‘difference’ is experienced by male and female leaders and can be explained with the help of Immanuel Kant’s theory. It is up to the reader to decide which of the two extremes is more preferable and common in today’s society. Perhaps it would be advisable not to choose either of them, but find a way in between instead.
5.2.3 Do expectations of the opposite gender affect and influence one’s own behaviour and characteristics?

Could the affect on the other gender depend on the interactions between men and women within organizations, where thoughts and actions are shared among them? Or has the impact something to do with the fact that men and women tend to use different words and body languages, and are therefore unable to understand each other properly? Does this make them act in the way they think the other gender wants them to? The author Robert Wright said:

"Each individual is a complex bunch of mind, body and soul. We are the total sum of those properties we have been born with and everything that we have learnt after the birth, set and shaped partially through the way we have been treated by others during the life. Personality is the outer casing and the action that represents the person’s inside. The way we speak, dress ourselves, walk and smile (or not smile), everything gives clues about the person underneath the surface. Our actions show our feelings and attitudes towards others and situations around us. Actually, we send signals that tell others about us. When you know how to recognize and to translate the signals that people send, and reply with your own signals, you can create good communication and mutual understanding" (Wright, 1988, p. 38).

Since men and women are different when it comes to certain attributes, the reason for them to communicate in different ways might be that they are not one hundred percent aware of each other’s signals; this can - in the long run - lead to misunderstandings when it comes to what we expect of each other. It is not possible for us to give exact reasons for the existence of this condition. We can merely draw some conclusions from the answers which we got during the interviews. Marion and Uhl-Bien argue that "(...) networks of distributed intelligence have as their fundamental processing units basic elements called 'agents'. Although each agent holds unique information no single agent has all of the information necessary to function on its own" (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 373-374). Furthermore, they say that the understanding and order that are developed within the organization are richer when information from multiple agents is combined: "This richness is dependent on the number of agents involved, the nature and number of links between them, and the dynamic interactions that occur as they cognitively and affectively relate with one another" (Ibid., p. 374).
5.2.3.1 The gender role

The gender role is a summarizing concept for the standards of expectations that are set on men and women on the basis of their sexes and the attitudes about how one will behave as man or woman (Granér, 1994). This varies between cultures as well as between subcultures within these cultural groups. Furthermore, if we look upon the gender role in an organizational perspective, it becomes obvious that the gender role varies depending on the organization in which someone is active. For example, the expectations on how one should behave as a man or a woman are quite different in healthcare and the manufacturing industry. The social role the individual chooses is a result of the ensemble between the sex identity and those attitudes about the gender role that he or she meets.

5.2.3.2 The male in the woman and the female in the man

The male and female qualities mentioned above complement each other (Granér, 1994). In the eastern philosophy the male and female characters are illustrated with the Yin-yang-symbol, where one of the fields represents the male and the other the female gender. The fields show the two extremes which flow together in a perfect balance. If an individual, a group or an organization identifies itself with the male or the female side only, they will turn out to be imbalanced. It is therefore of great importance for individuals as well as for groups and organizations to find both their masculine and feminine sides. However, modern surveys show that there are more similarities than differences in how men and women exercise their leadership style.

When we asked the interviewees whether in their opinion one gender influences and affects the other gender’s behaviour and characteristics, we got answers such as: “Men are using another language when talking to women than when talking to other men” (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female). Maybe this is a result of men’s thoughts about what women want or do not want to hear? The male manager of the same
organization said that there is a nicer atmosphere in a group that consists of both men and women. According to him the language is softer and friendlier when women are around, and there is no ‘backslapping’, which is otherwise quite common among men. Due to the theories we studied during our work on this project and our interviewees’ inputs, we come to the conclusion that people who have been working together with persons from the opposite gender for a long time get affected by their behaviour. In a group of both males and females the language and the atmosphere is different from that in a single sex group. The more links people share, the more alike they become. Naturally in an organization where people have been working together for a long time and have been involved in the same tasks, the impact is more likely to be stronger than in an organization where people have worked together for only a short time and have not been able to exchange as many thoughts.
5.2.4 Is it men who stop women from entering leading positions?

According to the respondents it is harder for a woman than for a man to reach leading positions on a higher level. The reason(s) for this is rather hard to locate. We live in a world where men and women should be treated equally, but even in the 21st century it is the male gender that rules in the companies. Women in general tend to think that they are not good enough and therefore do not apply for higher leadership positions. One of our respondents said: ”Women demand more from themselves and they set their own limitations, they do not trust in other women neither do they support each other” (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female). In addition to this we found out that women tend to be jealous of other women who perform successfully, and do not support those who would like to start or make progress in their career. Because they are aware of this, men tend to favour other men when it comes to filling a leading position. Should women then blame themselves and their ‘sisters’ for not fighting hard enough to reach the top? Or is it the men’s fault because they prevent women from entering higher positions? One of our respondents said, “The female style of leadership can in certain phases seem harder than the male, because women have to prove more to become accepted” (Germany/Production/Business Manager/Male). Perhaps it is easier to blame the opposite gender for failures and lack of female leaders in higher positions than to view one’s own attitude critically. On the other hand, it can hardly be entirely the women’s own fault. Men are also to be blamed, perhaps not so much for stopping women, but rather for being inactive in the strive for a more equal society, where women fight for the same positions because they have the same knowledge and skills as men, and not because they expect to be allocated into the boards and leading positions.

In 1994 Dr. Anna Wahl from the University of Stockholm undertook, as required by the Government, an investigation about leadership, which later resulted in the book Mäns föreställningar om kvinnor och chefskap. Within this investigation she deals with the fact that there have always been many strange theories about female leadership in our society. According to her this was due to the lack of female leaders in organizations. Manager properties were often connected with the male gender, and many men had never experienced a female superior in their working life. Dr. Wahl argued that good leadership had nothing to
do with the gender, instead the person should, no matter what sex, be able to achieve good results and advance a company and its staff. Other factors that she mentioned as leadership skills were education and social change. These are some of her thoughts:

“Nevertheless, a female manager may often stand fighting’s against a lot of prejudices concurrent she deals with a complex manager job. Neither can a female leader expect any backing-up from her colleagues in the same way as a man. However, in order to not offend the female colleagues she has to show her loyalty towards them at the same time she has to fulfil the male expectations of a leader. As it wouldn’t be enough with all other obligations a leader has, a woman becomes more visible since she is often in minority. It is more dangerous for a woman to take risks and to distinguish herself. If a female leader makes a mistake this will attract attention and become associated with the fact that she is a woman” (Svårt att vara kvinna och chef, 2008-04-29)

One of Dr. Wahl’s colleagues, the gender researcher and senior lecturer in pedagogy Lars Jalmert, responded to her investigation, suggesting that the only way to change the view of female leadership was to get men to understand that they could only gain advantages from an equal treatment, and that it was everyone’s responsibility in a society to make this happen.

A couple of years ago Anna Wahl, doctor of economics, and some of her colleagues carried out another research study, intending to find out whether men’s attitudes towards female leaders had been modified, and whether there had been any changes concerning the numbers of male and female representatives in management and boards. The same 500 companies that had been surveyed before were examined again. What they found out was that there had been nearly no changes at all or only small steps had been taken forwards. The male gender still dominated boards and leading positions. Men’s attitudes about leadership were still closely linked to masculinity. Dr. Wahl concluded that men still had more influence and power in the world of business and work than their female colleagues and therefore more rights and possibilities as far as important issues and decisions were concerned. Furthermore, she found out that the views of men and women on the question why there are so few female leaders were differing widely. Men do not see the lack of women in boards and higher positions as a problem, which complicates the change of attitudes. As long as leadership is connected with the male gender, females will always be a minority. The man becomes the benchmark, and in comparison women are considered as different; they
are believed to lack competence, neglect their career and not to know the ‘rules of the leadership game’. Femininity is regarded as a contradiction to the male image of leadership. Since men - with some few exceptions – find it easier to communicate with other men, there are probably no changes to come; history tends to repeat itself over and over again - a fact which is most unfortunate in our modern business life. One of our respondents remarked:

“There are differences between men and women, we should be aware of that, but women can have masculine leadership skills as well as men can use female attributes. Therefore it is difficult to compare male and female leadership. But I know for sure that, in order to become a successful company, there should be both men and women in the leader positions. Women think and do things differently than men, they are more interested in factors beyond the actual while men are more direct. For them there is either right or wrong, black or white. This is one of the reasons why I think both male and female thinking is necessary” (Sweden/Administration/CEO/Male).
5.2.5 Are female leaders softer and more sensitive than male leaders?

During our research for our thesis we were constantly confronted with statements such as the following: “When making decisions, women are guided first by emotions and then by reason, while men tend to have exactly the opposite priority list concerning their guidance” (Germany/Production/Manager/Male); “Female leaders pay much more attention to social components than their male colleagues (...); men are rather heedless when it comes to family, private life or employees’ issues (...)” (Germany/Production/Business Manager/Male). The three most frequently mentioned attributes and qualities of ‘female leadership’ throughout our interviews and questionnaires were: “warmth, social competence and openness”.

In this context communication plays a very important role, and in order to see its connection to this particular condition it is necessary to understand the different possibilities how humans are able to get in contact and exchange views with each other. Here the use of verbal communication comes to mind immediately and is the most obvious solution. Language is a very important feature when it comes to communication, and Rogers and Steinfatt differentiate this tool into the following six cultural factors: “Talk and silence, speaking style, turn-taking, self-disclosure, content vs. relationship and face” (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 149-154).

There is no doubt that verbal communication matters a lot and is quite often absolutely necessary, however, besides the words, nonverbal communication has an even greater impact on our expression skills. According to E. Rogers and T. Steinfatt nonverbal communication can be “defined as all types of communication that take place without words” (Ibid., p. 162) and “there is much more nonverbal communication, besides hand gestures, such as space, touching, time, odours, and even the manner in which one speaks (such as loudness of one’s voice)” (Ibid., p. 161). The interesting thing about this category is that it is usually “unintentional and unconscious – and therefore it cannot be as easily controlled as verbal communication” (Ibid., p. 161). In most cases it influences interactions between individuals even stronger than verbal communication as it happens mainly unconsciously, shows true intentions and reveals attitudes and moods even before someone speaks. Thus non-verbal communication seems to be the leading part of the two
According to Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus in their book *Leaders – Strategies for Taking Charge* and their research about leadership attributes it is important and frequently observed that people in those higher positions usually utilize the following ‘five key skills’:

1. The ability to accept people as they are, not as you would like them to be. […]
2. The capacity to approach relationships and problems in terms of the present rather than the past. […]
3. The ability to treat those who are close to you with the same courteous attention that you extend to strangers and casual acquaintances. […]
4. The ability to trust others, even if the risk seems great. […]
5. The ability to do without constant approval and recognition from others. […]

(Bennis & Nanus, 2003, p.61-62)

If those five skills described in the book are the ones that are required from leaders in the 21st century, and in case the condition that women are softer and more sensitive is true, shouldn’t it be the female gender that takes the lead and ought to be preferred in higher positions? During the interviews about ‘male and female leadership’ our respondents repeatedly mentioned the fact that women are better listeners, try to bring and hold the team together by means of long discussions and meetings in which everybody has a say. Men very often do not sense feelings and emotions of the people around them and therefore might not foresee or notice conflicts and problems straight away. Apparently they do not have the urge to talk about possible misunderstandings as it is seen as a ‘waste of time that could be used more efficiently for the actual work and project’. It has to be questioned whether the statements that we received from our interviewees can be applied to most of the leaders in other countries and cultures, too, and whether they are in fact representative of the researched environments. It remains a fact, however, that the above mentioned comments were made by several of the leaders individually interviewed by us.
5.2.6 Are men more focused on their career than women?

According to statistics there are more men than women in the top leading positions within Europe. Are women not as eager as men to make a career, or can this phenomenon be explained by other factors? Is it because women are stopped from entering higher positions, or are they the ones that prevent themselves and their female colleagues from being successful? During the interviews we found out that women in general often give priority to other things in life besides their jobs. Very often they consider being a good mother or/and a wife as much more important. There are people who say that it is impossible for a woman to have both a career and a happy family life. Men on the other hand do not allow the family to be an obstacle on their way to a successful career. Even though many women would like to enter a leading position, it might be impossible for them since both men and other women may ‘hold them back’. In Anna Wahl’s book Könsstrukturer i organisationer Gutek and Larwood argue that there are four arguments against women who want to have a career:

"First of all there are different expectations on men and women when it comes to what is appropriate for each gender, which influences the choice of work, secondly husbands and wives are different when it comes to follow and support one and another’s career, which means that the women’s career is choice number two in a marriage. Due to this men usually get more support in their careers than women do. Third, the parenthood is displayed differently for men and women. The motherhood takes more time and energy than the fatherhood does. The fourth and last argument is concerning that women meet more difficulties and obstacles in the working life than men do, like for example discrimination and with different types of stereotyping. All these factors influence women’s careers as well as the possibilities to actually have one” (Wahl, 2003, p. 91).

The reason why women are not heading for higher positions could be - according to men - that women do not get support from their families, they do not dare to take risks and are not willing to advance. Women on the other hand think the reason for this is that females in general do not have the education which is necessary in order to be promoted, and in addition to this they believe that they do not get the same attention from their bosses than men do (Wahl, 2003). Maybe both explanations are correct: It could actually be true that women in general are not as focused on their career as men because there are other – more important - things in their lives, and it is probably also true that women are often not promoted to certain positions and/or do not have the necessary education. As we all know, it is
rather time-consuming to be the one in charge, either in a leading position within one’s career or when taking care of the household and children; so each woman must find a way to reach her own personal goal in life.

A very important point in this context is the question how far people go to get the position they want. Men are said to be more risk-taking and more likely to pretend to have certain skills, even though they might not have them, just to get pushed into the spotlight and be selected: “Men want people to believe that they are better than they are” (Sweden/Economy/Manager/Female). The importance of status, prestige and reputation is apparently rooted within the nature of the male gender as already in old times men had the duty to hunt and defend the tribe. They do not only have to impress the females, but must also fight for a powerful position among the other men in order to earn respect and take over responsibilities, which then leads to a greater status. This could be a reason why men are more focused on their careers than women. On the other hand it has frequently been pointed out that due to globalization and other factors the environment, the life-styles and the goals of women have changed. A shift in these aspects might also lead to a modification for women to give priority to their careers rather than to other occupations.

So maybe this condition is an obsolete one; women might nowadays be even more focused on their career as it is not as difficult as it used to be to have both a demanding job and a family life due to governmental support such as tuition free kindergartens. How someone’s priority list in life looks like probably depends on many different factors, and ‘gender’ aspects might or might not be among them.
5.3 Aggregation of empirical and theoretical aspects

Depending on what methodology and overall approach is used, theoretical and empirical aspects can be compared and matched. In this particular study the inductive approach was chosen as it is the most suitable one for a wide topic like ‘gender leadership’. Therefore we collected empirical data through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews and tried to combine it with theories. We used many different sources, but concentrated mainly on Immanuel Kant’s study about ‘conditions’. With the help of his theoretical background and the knowledge and experiences gained from representatives of the actual business world, we were able to locate many ‘conditions’ that affect ‘gender leadership’. We chose the six most important ones as they were mentioned by several of our respondents. Although the interviewees basically called them ‘prejudices’ we used the term ‘conditions’, as ‘prejudice’ is a very strong word, might point in the wrong direction and create a false picture.

Condition it is argued whether women are more organized and detailed than men; here we have realized that women are probably more capable of multi-tasking, make more use of verbal and non-verbal communication through apparently a greater amount of words per day and have a greater variety of social competences such as being a good listener, showing emotions and making sure that every team member is included.

The second condition claimed that men are more direct than women. Men are said to rather speak out loud, do not consider other people’s feelings and frankly expressing their opinions straight away. Women on the other hand rather tend to ‘wrap in’ and use an indirect style during discussions and dialogues.

The next condition deals with the question whether the expectations of the opposite gender affect and influence one’s own behaviour and characteristics – the issue being that due to the apparently different use of communication and facial expressions both sexes have ‘unrealistic’ expectations. This might have an impact on how we behave, walk, talk or even dress. One of the reasons here could be the fact that we are afraid not to be able to meet those expectations and disappoint the people around us.
The question whether it is the men that stop women from entering leading positions is discussed in condition four. Women are supposed to have to fight harder in order to get the same respect and positions as men due to the fact that males are not used to having female bosses and that they want to keep their power over the ‘weaker gender’. But there is also the assertion that it is rather the other females who prevent women from climbing up the ‘career ladder’, as they are more jealous.

Condition five is about the issue whether women are softer and more sensitive than their male colleagues. This condition is highly related to condition two as here the different communication styles are mentioned, too. The way how women lead a conversation in a rather smooth and caring manner is one of the main arguments in this part. Women’s non-verbal communication and their apparently caring and calm ways are important points regarding this condition.

Last, but not least condition six is about the question whether men are more focused on their career than women. According to scientific research papers the importance of status, respect and powerful positions is deeply rooted within the male’s nature. In the past his main task was to provide the family and tribe with food and to protect them. Thus he might be afraid that his reputation both with other men and with females will suffer if he cannot constantly impress them. Women on the other hand are said to have other priorities in life besides the career, such as their families. It is certainly still true that in most societies it is more acceptable for men to go out and have a career than for women as they are supposed to take care of the children and the household.

All these conditions are based on both the empirical data that we gained during our research phase and the theoretical background, which is mainly dominated by the studies of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. There is no concrete solution or answer to any of the questions asked within this chapter, but the thoughts that were expressed are rather a contribution to discussions about ‘gender leadership’ and are meant to make people aware of those different factors and the angles from which each condition can be looked upon.
6. GENERAL REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter contains general reflections about the thesis, its study area, the conclusion of the different outcomes from the various chapters above as well as some suggestions for future research studies. It is meant to be a summary of the whole project and at the same time a combination of its three fundamental components: the empirical material, the theoretical part and our own personal opinion.

Circumstances, opinions and beliefs that were common ten, twenty or even only five years ago, may not be relevant and realistic today. It is a matter of fact that situations, habits and lifestyles of people change as time passes by. One of the issues that is connected with constant change is ‘gender leadership’. While it was almost impossible for women to enter higher positions in companies and organizations in the past - especially when these environments were dominated by men - they have a lot more opportunities and possibilities nowadays. Current figures and statistics prove that the number of females attending higher education and striving to get into leading positions is rising enormously. Although it is a legal right and one of the basic principles in the western world that men and women have to be treated equally, females in leading positions are still viewed sceptically.

As this topic is relevant in today’s business world and attracts more and more attention through the interaction between countries due to the ongoing globalization, we regard this issue as being of great interest to the majority of people worldwide and therefore it deserves a deeper research and a broader analysis. In order to compare theories concerning this topic with actual present situations, we designed a questionnaire which we then sent to both male and female leaders from all kinds of business areas within Germany and Sweden. We concentrated our research on these two countries as they are our home countries and the ones we feel most related to. Of course it cannot be denied that it is clearly a limitation and restriction of our research area to take two Western European countries into account only. However, due to the lack of time and resources for our work, we were forced to shorten it and limit the research field to get a representative view of ‘gender leadership’. In future studies this point could be of great interest, and differences and similarities between various countries, continents and even cultures could be analysed in greater detail. In addition to this, aspects like religion, political situations, social environments or historical backgrounds could be looked at.
In our questionnaire we asked present leaders to write down their thoughts about leadership in general and particularly about ‘female and male leadership’. These leaders used specific attributes and described characteristics and certain behaviours, thus explaining what in their point of view the most important features of ‘gender leadership’ are. In addition to these statements we asked our interviewees to inform us about the experiences which they had made within their positions, their environments and their companies/organizations. Moreover we asked them to rank the possible reasons why male and female leaders might act differently or in a similar way according to their importance. They could choose between sex, age, social reasons, educational reasons, cultural background and economical reasons. They also had the opportunity to add further possibilities in case they could think of any more reasons. This group of people in leading positions filled out the questionnaire or even agreed on having face-to-face interviews with us, which provided us with a good understanding of the current image of ‘gender leadership’. At this point we would like to introduce another suggestion as to further investigations into this research area. A small, simple and random selection of people to be interviewed can only to some extent be the basis for a fair representative study of the field. In order to have a more detailed analysis, it is important to do research on-site in the different environments, accompany some leaders for a longer period of time, monitor their every-day business and see how they handle certain situations. It is also necessary to ascertain the opinions of the employees and the staff of the organization. Many researchers studying human behaviour and reactions found out that most people are not completely honest during interviews. These statistics show that in an interview or a survey one tends to “gloss over” certain things, rather using an answer expressing a common opinion or wishful thinking than the truth. It is particularly difficult for a person in a leading position to admit weaknesses or problems within a company or organization, so the researcher must be careful to double-check the results of his/her study.

Throughout all our interviews and the feedback from our questionnaires we were constantly confronted with the term ‘prejudices’. It was very interesting to see that both male and female leaders mentioned the existence of what they called ‘prejudices’ in all kinds of business areas. We selected the most frequently described ‘prejudices’ and analysed those in greater detail, keeping in mind the different characteristics of the various interviewees such as their age, their position and their educational background. When we were looking for a theoretical background to compare with our empirical data, we discovered Immanuel Kant’s theory about ‘conditions’. This well-known German philosopher from the 18th century claimed that all humans react unconsciously in a certain way because
of the influence of those so-called ‘conditions’. Immanuel Kant basically stated that our mind is to a certain extent already set and determined. When it comes to making decisions or to judge a situation or person critically, we will - according to Kant - not react rationally, but be guided and influenced by the conditions. In other words:

*With regard to knowledge, Kant argued that the rational order of the world as known by science could never be accounted for merely by the fortuitous accumulation of sense perceptions. It was instead the product of the rule-based activity of “synthesis.” This consisted of conceptual unification and integration carried out by the mind through concepts or the “categories of the understanding” operating on the perceptual manifold within space and time, which are not concepts, but forms of sensibility that are a priori necessary conditions for any possible experience. Thus the objective order of nature and the causal necessity that operates within it are dependent upon the mind.* (Immanuel Kant; 2008-03-14)

Keeping this theoretical concept in mind, we decided not to use the term ‘prejudice’, as this is also a very strong word and can easily be misleading, but rather take a closer look at six of the most customary ‘conditions’. We focused on the following six:

1. Are women more organized and detailed than men?
2. Are men more direct?
3. Do expectations of the opposite gender affect and influence one’s own behaviour and characteristics?
4. Is it men who stop women from entering leading positions?
5. Are female leaders softer and more sensitive than male leaders?
6. Are men more focused on their career than women?

There are doubtlessly many more conditions that could be researched in accordance with this topic. However, as a result of our interviews with respondents from various branches we came to the conclusion that those six were the most frequently mentioned and therefore obviously the most important and influential ones. In future studies it could of course be very interesting to analyse other conditions than the ones that we chose and maybe compare them with our selection, checking what similarities or differences may be found. Another suggestion could be to use the same six conditions that we located from our empirical material and match them with another theoretical background. There are certainly many other strong and relevant theories that this topic of ‘gender leadership’ could be referred to.
This study, however, uses Kant’s theory about ‘conditions’ as its theoretical framework, and according to this philosopher - the reason why most societies observe and experience ‘typically female’ and ‘typically male’ habits, characteristics and attitudes, could be the fact that our human mind is influenced by ‘conditions’ that we are not consciously aware of. Discussions about which of those apparently different attributes suit a leadership position best are continuously going on. While it has always been the ‘typically male’ attitudes, such as directness, a powerful and risk-taking style or strong and self-confident behaviour, which were traditionally regarded as more appropriate for leadership positions, more and more opinions can be heard today, claiming that it is – quite on the contrary – the ‘typically female’ style that is necessary to run a business successfully. There are even sources and opinions such as the one below which say that these ‘typically female’ characteristics are the ones adapted to the needs of today’s society, and that the attributes of the opposite gender are quite obsolete. So maybe it is the truth after all that competitors in high heels will win the business marathon in the new millennium?

*Women’s management style, which centers around communication and positive working relationships, is better suited than men’s to the team-oriented leadership of the 21 Century.*

- Better social skills
- Better communicators
- Keep people informed
- Put the success of the team first
- Use influencing skills rather than authority
- Better team players

*Women may be better at managing a diverse workforce:*

- Less traditional values
- More tolerant of differences
- Less bound by social traditions
Women are better at motivating others:

- More readily show appreciation for the efforts of others
- More expressive of their thoughts and feelings
- More enthusiastic

(Female leadership – the style of the 21st Century, 2008-04-29)

Regardless of which attributes are said to be either more ‘typically female’ or rather ‘typically male’, it is an undeniable fact and one that we all have to acknowledge that situations, circumstances and demands are changing over the time. It is important for current and future leaders to be aware of these changing aspects and to be ready to adapt and adjust to new requirements. ‘Soft skills’ such as communication, open-minded behaviour and social competence have always been an important feature of successful leaders in all kinds of environments, however, their significance is increasing rapidly in the new century. There is an ongoing discussion about what characteristics, core values, principles, attributes and attitudes, qualities, features, habits and skills leaders who want to compete in the 21st century have to possess – and of course whether we personally have these qualities. How can we define a ‘good’ leader in comparison to an ‘average’ leader, and can those skills be trained or do they rather originate from a natural talent?

Describing what ‘good’ or rather ‘successful’ leadership is all about is a quite difficult and complicated task and can hardly be done at all. Taking risks, standing up for what you believe in, presenting one’s vision to the public, being self-confident as well as radical in making one’s decisions can be either described as being foolish and overweening or as brilliant and strong. Most characteristics appear controversial when shown in their full extremes. In our opinion, finding the main value and then maybe orientating oneself into one direction more than another is what successful leadership is about. Being a risk-taker also means occasional failure, therefore receiving critical remarks goes along with it. Using criticism as a means of learning and improving turns risk-taking into a positive characteristic. Having a realistic view of oneself is to some extent as important a trait as it may be difficult. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. The main aspect here is to acknowledge those features and work with them to minimize foibles and maximize fortes. This, we think, is the closest to a ‘recipe’ for a good leader that we can get. Eleanor Roosevelt and Margaret Thatcher are two modern examples of powerful female leaders; they have demonstrated how successful and strong women can be in
areas like politics and economics, hitherto clearly dominated by men. Not only have they proven that females can achieve a lot through hard work and self-discipline, but also that they are capable of having both: a remarkable career and a family. Their success was mainly due to their passionate commitment to their beliefs and values. Are we witnessing a drastic change of leadership styles? Is the era of ‘dominant men’ coming to an end, has the time come for women – so far portrayed as the ‘weaker gender’ – to take over? From our collection of empirical data and the comparison of our results with relevant pieces of literature one might assume that in the 21st century it is necessary ‘to wear high heels in order to win the business marathon’. It is a fact that the competition for both men and women in the business world is tough and demanding. If they want to achieve a high position within an organization and secure a good job with a remarkable status and a fair amount of responsibilities, it is important for them to have a ‘perfect’ resume with a quite outstanding academic background and practical experiences. At an age of globalization it is also important to be flexible and open–minded towards other countries and cultures, and English as the ‘world language’ is almost compulsory nowadays. The future will show which gender is more capable of meeting all these standards. During the last decades the number of girls and young women at colleges and universities has risen in many European and Anglo-Saxon countries; in some areas – such as languages, art, social studies - they are even more successful than men. When it comes to filling the top positions, however, there is a clear male majority. So maybe men are still a step ahead and it will be a long time until women take the lead and set trends. The question that we have asked ourselves throughout the whole research and implementation phase is whether this distinction between ‘typically female and male characteristics’ isn’t rather irrelevant and the most foolish stereotype, and whether it is not far more important to see the individual person. Everyone is different, regardless of his sex. We can only guess what the future will bring as far as requirements for people in leading positions are concerned, but it is necessary to point out that they might change very quickly and that ‘gender leadership’ is a topic which will probably be discussed for a very long time to come. We can either wait and see what is going to happen, or we can start working on our concepts of thinking. In case the theory about the ‘conditions’ by Kant is true and we are influenced by them, isn’t it then rather unlikely that circumstances will develop if we do not change our ‘conditions’? It is certainly an issue well worth considering.
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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire
Introduction:

The statistical results which we will gain from the following questionnaire will be part of the Master’s Thesis by Ida Svensson and Marie-Theresa Edbauer. The thesis will have the title: ‘Are competitors in high heels more likely to win the business marathon in the new millennium?’ and will be published in the University of Kalmar during the spring term 2008. Through this study we want to create a clearer picture and a better understanding for current and future leaders from all environments about the blurry and fuzzy topic ‘gender leadership’. We investigate prejudices, take theory as well as practical examples into account, analyse individual characteristics and elements other than sex in order to hopefully contribute to the general knowledge and specialised expertise of today’s and tomorrow’s leaders. The following detailed data will be kept privately and will not be released into public, but only used to get general figures. (Names will not be mentioned!) If more space is needed for answering the following questions, please continue on the backside of the paper.

General Part:

Name (optional): ..........................................................................................................................

Sex: Male □ Female □

Age: 18-29 □ 30-39 □ 40-49 □ 50-59 □ >60 □

Education/Title: ...........................................................................................................................

Position within the company: ......................................................................................................

Specialist Part:

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the term “leadership”?

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2. What comes to your mind when you hear the words “female leadership”?

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3. What comes to your mind when you hear the words “male leadership”?


4. What is in your opinion the contemporary view about leaders? (e.g. qualities)


5. Mention general attributes for leadership which are in your point of view the most important ones.


6. Which of the attributes mentioned in the previous answer are in your point of view related to female and which to male leaders?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female Leaders</th>
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7. a) How many words would you need to describe female leadership?

b) What are these words?


III
c) Could you give more sense to these words by expressing your own experiences and thoughts?

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........................................................................................................................................
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8. a) In your opinion do similarities between female and male leaders depend on?

☐ Sex Ranking:___
☐ Age Ranking:___
☐ Social reasons Ranking:___
☐ Educational reasons Ranking:___
☐ Culture/Background Ranking:___
☐ Economical reasons Ranking:___
☐ Other ..............................(then what) Ranking:___

b) In your opinion do differences between female and male leaders depend on?

☐ Sex Ranking:___
☐ Age Ranking:___
☐ Social reasons Ranking:___
☐ Educational reasons Ranking:___
☐ Culture/Background Ranking:___
☐ Economical reasons Ranking:___
☐ Other ..............................(then what) Ranking:___

(Choose as many as you like then rank them from 1 to 7, where 1 is the most important and 7 the least important.)

9. Would you say there is a typical leadership style that suits your organisation better than another?

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Thank you very much for participating in our questionnaire and sharing your knowledge and experiences with us!

Yours Ida Svensson & Marie-Theresa Edbauer
The University of Kalmar

The University of Kalmar has more than 9000 students. We offer education and research in natural sciences, technology, the maritime field, social science, languages and humanities, teacher training, caring sciences and social service.

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