“Great Men” versus the “Female Leadership Advantage”
- An analysis of gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards selected leadership attributes

Authors: Valerie Brockmann and Andreas Pfleger
Tutor: Prof. Dr. Dr. Philippe Daudi
Examiner: Prof. Dr. Björn Bjerke
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An Anecdote

A traveler was walking down a road when he met a man from the next town.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am hoping to stay in the next town tonight. Can you tell me what the townspeople are like?"

"Well," said the townsman, "how did you find the people in the last town you visited?"

"Oh, they were an irascible bunch. Kept to themselves. Took me for a fool. Over-charged me for what I got. Gave me very poor service."

"Well, then," said the townsman, "you'll find them pretty much the same here."

(Manage Train Learn, n.d.)

(Source: Manage Train Learn, n.d.)
Abstract

The topic of leadership has been present in the academic world for about 100 years. In science, this is considered a rather short period of time, during which the discipline has developed enormously. Initially formulated theories and approaches have now been revised for the most part or even in their entirety. Yet, of special interest for the purpose of this research is the extremely slow development of females in this context and the lack of attention that is given to gender biased perceptions.

This academic paper reviews the earliest beginnings of the subject and, as the title suggests, covers not only the history of the subject, but also the latest trends and developments in the area of leadership and gender. As it’s been said by the townsman (c.f. Anecdote), the perceptions people have of their surroundings are as diverse as the people themselves. They depend upon an infinite amount of personal experiences, shaping each and every person’s character the way they are. Therefore, during the course of this thesis, special attention is given to the role of females and especially the cognitions towards female leaders in order to address the issue of potential gender biased perceptions.

By means of an online survey - which was not directed towards the general public, but rather towards persons dedicated to the field of gender and leadership - numerical and qualitative data on questions about gender-specific perceptions of leadership was collected.

In summary, it can be deduced from these results, that there is a difference in the perception of leadership qualities with respect to gender. However, it should be noted that the gender biases work in two ways: The perceived differences are dependent on both, the gender of the person who answered the questions, as well as the gender of the person in the leadership position. In our opinion as researcher, the findings reveal that there are, indeed, deeply anchored, probably subconscious perceptions that seem to be associated with the topic of gender and leadership. However, all in all it can be said that the commonly assumed stereotypes of clearly male and female leader attributes do not consistently exist anymore. According to the findings of our research, the awareness of females associated with hitherto mostly male perceived leader attributes is present and will probably further consolidate in the years to come.

Hence, the findings of this thesis reinforce the general positive evolution of females in leader positions. Additionally, they nurture and further strengthen growing idea of females as being naturally perceived as leaders in order to ensure fair and equitable systems for women and men in leadership.
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1. About this Thesis - The Relevance of the Topic and our Motivation

The thesis at hand aims at exploring, illustrating, and outlining attitudes towards and perceptions of gender-related leadership functions. Hence, the following work does not serve as a revelation or summary of differences between female and male leadership, but to show the diverse perceptions that might exist about leadership functions with regard to gender and its implications for companies and other institutions where these issues might play a role. Because of the considerable amount of attention given to the topics of leadership and gender throughout numerous different channels, the following pages are divided into sections to help illustrate the relevance of our topic and the motivation for fully committing ourselves to this research area.

1.1. The Media

“While the tide is changing and more women are being elevated into leadership roles, there is still much work to do.” (Forbes Magazine 2014)

“Female participation at the top table remains strikingly scarce.” (The New York Times 2012)

“Despite evidence that men are typically perceived as more appropriate and effective than women in leadership positions, a recent debate has emerged in the popular press and academic literature over the potential existence of a female leadership advantage.” (Paustian-Underdahl, et al. in Journal of Applied Psychology 2014)

“A significant body of research (…) shows that for women, the subtle gender bias that persists in organizations and in society disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader.” (Ely, et al. in Harvard Business Review 2013)

“At all levels, women are rated higher in fully 12 of the 16 competencies that go into outstanding leadership.” (Folkman & Zenger in Harvard Business Review 2012)

“Female leaders are no longer viewed as inferior to their male counterparts, new research revealed.” (Brooks in Business News Daily 2014)
“The traditional notion of leadership based on a masculine hierarchical form of top-down leadership is not only not effective (...) it is not built on the strengths that women bring.” (The Huffington Post 2015)

As it can be derived from the quotes above, the perceptions of and attitudes towards leadership and gender are a contemporary and highly discussed topic - not only amongst business people, but also amongst psychologists and behavioral scientists. Many studies, especially ones conducted during the last decade point towards the fact that females do embody the same characteristics and skills associated with leadership that men do (c.f. Eagly & Carly 2003, Paustian-Underdahl, et al. 2014, Koenig, et al. 2011), however, females are still merely holding 4.8% of CEO positions at Standard & Poor’s 500 companies according to Catalyst (2015) - the world’s leading non-profit organization for the expansion of women’s opportunities in business.

The following graph Women in S&P 500 Companies reproduces the findings of a study conducted by Catalyst investigating the dispersion of different positions women held in the 500 biggest stock market-listed companies throughout the United States (2015):

Graph 1 – Women in S&P 500 Companies
As it can be seen in this graph, women do indeed represent an amount of 45% of the total labor force of the 500 market-listed corporations, however, with a rising managerial level the percentage decreases down to the mentioned 4.8% of CEO positions. Naturally, questions for the cause and possible solutions of this matter are rising. However, to find a reasonable starting point, the importance and level of influence which mainstream media has on society should be considered and might be, in this case, used as a supportive tool.

Many studies indicate that media intensely shapes perceptions, beliefs and paradigms of society (c.f. Folkman & Zenger 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the mainstream media can also be used for raising awareness of the underrepresentation of women in management positions and to highlight and present those who are, as well as their achievements and actions (Bhatt, et al. 2013).

Another aspect arguing for the relevance of the topic of gender and leadership in the light of media is its presence in governmental issues like the introduction of a mandatory 30% quota of women in corporate boards in Germany (Miller & Smale, 2015). Not only the act itself, but especially the attention given to the new law in the media is an important and necessary step in order to raise attention for the topic and provide a leading role for other governments. The massive attention the issue of the new law evoked indeed constitutes a highly valuable and strong argument for the relevance and especially the current nature of the topic. As the government action described above shows, the topic of leadership and gender has a tremendous scope, affecting many institutions, not only in business but also in other fields such as education, health care or government.

Moreover, not only the mainstream media itself but its different channels are a crucial aspect that should not be underestimated, especially in the light of dissemination of information. In this case, the awareness of leadership and gender problems, just like the underrepresentation of woman in corporate boardrooms, can be spread out around the globe in an instance. New media tools such as social networks, blogs and apps should therefore be considered and used in order to spread information rapidly and raise awareness for current problems. Putting these insights in the context of the relevance of leadership and gender, it can be seen that particularly new media channels can be used to spread information and make a local action become global news. Therefore, the topic and issues around leadership and gender are present around the world and do indeed affect a tremendous number of people.
Putting the above stated arguments and numbers into the context of gender equality, women’s rights and other gender-related issues which have been discussed for many years now, the questions arise: Why are women still highly underrepresented in leadership positions and what are the driving factors for this phenomenon? What are perceptions of and attitudes towards leadership that still makes society assume that leaders are naturally males?

1.2. Academia

Next to the arguments found in the context of mainstream media, there is also a high relevance of leadership and gender in academia. Indeed, many similar arguments emerging from the influence of mass media can also be found in academia. Therefore, it should be noted that they are not to be seen as two separate worlds, but rather as two intertwined channels of research development communication tools: Throughout academic resources, a tremendous number of researches, scientific articles, books and other publications can be found. Only within the first three months of the year 2015, more than 10 000 scientific publications around leadership and gender were already made accessible in Google Scholar (Google Inc. 2015), Google’s scholarly search engine and media database for academic literature. These significant numbers reveal the popularity and currency of the topic and might also surmise that its impact and magnitude won’t decrease but rather increase in the years to come.

However, not only the current and future outlook shows the relevance of the topic of leadership and gender, but also the tremendous number of already existing scientific publications around the subject, which date back decades ago, reveal the topic’s magnitude and gravity. Contemplating for instance the tenure of Margaret Thatcher, who became Britain’s Prime Minister in the late 1970ies as well as the first female leader of a political party, her role and actions were under close scrutiny of those around her and the general public. The fact that she was a female governing a global power like Great Britain caused high degrees of controversy. However, her person and leadership represents only one of the many examples from the past where the position of a female leader unleashes a revolution and serves as the starting point of many research projects around gender and leadership. Up until today, Margaret Thatcher’s actions and behaviors are discussed and pondered. This should not imply a judgement of her behavior, but illustrate the attention given to her person compared to other male leaders whose actions might not have been screened as closely and investigated as
accurately as Thatcher’s. Merely the fact that she was a female leader marked the basis for a whole new era of gender studies and researches on male and female leadership attributes and styles. This examples also indicates the intertwining nature of mass-media and academia in the context of gender and leadership as Thatcher’s tenure caused much agitation that was consequently communicated through mass-media while at the same time constituting the starting point for many researches on the topic in academia.

Next to these arguments, also the diversity and range of different topics within the field of leadership and gender constitute an argument for the popularity and relevance of the issue. Even though it seems like the massive amount of already existing academic papers and studies provide answers to the many research questions stemming from gender and leadership, the diversity of the topic shows different. Especially in the light of the many initiatives and projects launched in order to overcome the problem of gender inequality, its direction changes fast and steadily. However, this also constitutes the excitement about the topic which itself is very lively and ever-changing. The insights gained throughout our personal research merely touch a tiny area of this extremely multifaceted field and leave space for further commitment and effort in the future.

1.3. Our Personal Approach

Next to the very different and interesting approaches illustrated above, a very personal relation to the topic also constitutes a major reason for the choice of investigating the field of leadership and gender. As we, Valerie Brockmann and Andreas Pfleger, both experienced different leadership styles under female and male leaders during our professional careers so far, and we as a thesis team, are able to investigate the issue from both gender perspectives, the research question of what are the gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards selected Leadership attributes? is a very suitable and very interesting topic for us. The following paragraphs aim at emphasizing our personal motivation and background in the field of leadership and gender in detail and will clearly exhibit the relevance and personal commitment to the thesis at hand:
1.3.1. **Valerie**

Being a student of leadership and having worked in the field of Finance and Information Technologies (IT) – a still highly male dominated sector – I experienced the role and perception of gender in leadership positions from a very personal standpoint. In my opinion, the awareness of gender inequalities and especially the perception of leadership attributes inherently connected with males are still prevailing in today’s business life. Even though many actions are taken in order to overcome the gender inequality which is especially noticeable in upper management levels, the picture of a leader as naturally being male continues to be alive by the mainstream media and the reality in the workplace. With the thesis at hand and the associated research, I anticipate exploring potential reasons for this matter and an approach on how to overcome it. However, it should be noted that the aim cannot consist of a strategic and generalized plan on how to behave in order to become a female leader, but rather pursues the goal to raise awareness for the attributes that are seen as rather male or female leader peculiarities and the reasons behind it in order to overcome leader barriers for females. This means that the following presentation of our research findings aims at first defining our personal definition of leadership and then, drawing on this, revealing certain leader attributes and their gender connotation in order to expose what actually needs to be done to overcome gender inequalities and stereotypes.

The major motivation for me to fully commit myself to the given topic is my very personal involvement in the issue: as I might become a future leader in the IT sector, I will most certainly have to deal with leadership issues and male dominated perceptions of leader attributes. Hence for me, the thesis at hand and its findings will and already serve as a preparation for my future position and therefore have an extremely high personal value for me. I do feel that especially my studies in the field of leadership and management provided me with the appropriate background knowledge not only for my personal development, but also for my ability to serve as a role model and inspiration for others. The active involvement in a very contemporary and broadly discussed topic such as leadership and gender is a very rewarding task that steadily motivates me to further commit myself thoroughly. Especially the considerable amount of positive, extremely interesting and constructive feedback we received in response to our questionnaire, as well as the many requests for further information about our research clearly exhibit the popularity and importance of the topic and again testifies its relevance.
All in all I do believe that the outcome and findings of the present thesis can be of high value and use for its readers and especially for us as the authors, it revealed many crucial findings and insights that will be helpful and supportive for our future roles as leaders.

1.3.1.1. My Personal Approach to Leadership

Next to the stated arguments according my personal approach on the thesis at hand, i.e. leadership in the context of gender, the following sections aim at illustrating the readers my very own view and notion on leadership itself:

When I started my time as a student of Leadership and Management in International Contexts at Linnaeus University in Kalmar, Sweden, I already felt like I knew myself, what I wanted to reach in life and I also thought I already had a fairly good idea about what leadership means to me. I never pondered much about what it actually comprises and what impacts effective and ineffective leadership can have, but rather took leaders I met over time the way they were. This opinion changed drastically already during the very first days of my time as a leadership student: “The Art of Leading Others Comes from the Art of Leading Oneself” (Daudi, et al. 2015) was the opening quote Dr. Philippe Daudi used for officially starting the Master Programme Leadership and Management in International Contexts at Linnaeus University. This citation had a major impact on my personal view of leadership and enabled me to use my time as a master student to truly focus on my very own development. Through the many personal reflections, I was able to actually apply the gained knowledge from lectures and readings to my own behavior and mind-set. For me, this insight was extremely helpful and a true eye-opener as especially my time as an undergraduate student was shaped by a high amount of theoretical knowledge transfer, rather seldom applying it to my very personal case. I truly believe that this is the heart of leadership, to actually have good things straightened out with oneself, i.e. knowing oneself.

Connecting to this idea and illustrating my personal approach on leadership, one article protruded from all the others and influenced my mind-set just as much as the quote from the beginning. How will you measure your life? published by Clayton M. Christensen, an American Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School in Boston, MA, in 2010 is article, which in the first place was intended as a speech for his graduating students from HBS. It outlines advices and support on how to manage one’s own life in order to find its true meaning as well as happiness and satisfaction.
What is most striking about his article is that even though he describes his very personal story and beliefs, he does not generalize his advices but rather provides inspiration and room for self reflection. Therefore, especially for us students entering the job market in the near future and mainly focusing on our professional career, it can be of extremely high value to take a moment once in a while and actually reflect about the things that really make life enjoyable and that make us happy. This insight goes back to my first argument, i.e. knowing oneself, and also to the quote about leading oneself. As it can be seen, leadership for me is a very personal and self reflective topic, composed of many different facets.

Another, for me, important and influential insight I gained over my time as a student of leadership that truly formed the meaning of it and that had and still has a major impact on my everyday-life is the concept of multipliers and diminishers introduced and elaborated by Liz Wiseman, leadership teacher and president of the Wiseman Group, an American leadership and development company (The Wiseman Group 2013): “Multipliers are leaders who use their intelligence to amplify the smarts and capabilities of the people around them. When these leaders walk into a room, light bulbs go on; ideas flow and problems get solved. These are the leaders who inspire the people with whom they work to stretch themselves and surpass expectations. These leaders use their knowledge and insight to make everyone around them smarter and more capable.” Next to the multipliers, there are the diminishers, who rather “(…) drain intelligence, energy, and capability from the ones around them and always need to be the smartest ones in the room” (Wiseman with McEown 2010, p.: Backcover). As it can be derived from the above outlined definitons, muiltiplying and diminishing leaders can have a huge influence on the behaviour of their followers, encouraging or discouraging effective work. What is very interesting for me personally as well as for my understanding of leadership is, that effective leaders do not solve any issue for their followers, helping and supporting them whenever necessary, but inspiring them to become their best possible self in order to actually help themselves. For me, this insight is highly valuable and can be applied in every day life.

In conclusion, I do believe that leadership starts with the leader herself. Knowing oneself as well as being aware and conscious about the own influence on others is an important and powerful insight. “Turning the theoretical lenses on yourself” as stated by Christensen (2010, p. 47) puts it in a nutshell, as I do believe that many times, we tend to forget that the knowledge gained from our education is not for obtaining any paper proving our brilliant expertise in a certain field, but for ourselves in order to find, as Christensen stated, “the metric
by which your life will be judged” (2010, p. 51). Therefore committing oneself fully to the
effort of seeing the overall picture of oneself and how to actively make use of one’s own
knowledge and abilities to inspire others is a crucial insight that should matter to us as
effective future leaders.

1.3.2. Andreas

There are several reasons for my interest in the topic of gender and leadership. Starting
chronologically, my upbringing with one older sister and one older brother had a major
influence on me. My sister and brother both were always role models for me, and living as a
family always had a high importance to all of our family members. Whilst my brother had a
similar war of tackling challenges to the way I do, a relaxed, intuitive and reactive manner,
my sister always had a different approach of going about things: She was a perfectionist who
was not afraid to go the extra mile to reach the highest level of competence attainable to her,
be it in academia or social life. Seeing these two different ways of going through life and
facing challenges made an impression on me and inspired me, to try and find my own way of
doing things. Whilst this was beneficial for me personally, at the same time it caught my eye
that my brother and sister were doing things differently and as a consequence of this I soon
realized that it seemed liked there was more than one way of achieving success. Although I
did not realize it back then, I now understand that this was the root of my interest in gender
related differences. The dimension of leadership was added to this interest later, and again has
a multitude of sources. First off, my mother, who worked as a teacher, instilled in me the
belief that one should have pride in one’s job. My mother, much like my sister, was always
willing to put in extra effort such as joining school classes on foreign trips way more often
than her call of duty would have demanded and investing time, energy and money in making
sure that her pupils would have a rewarding and successful learning experience. Once again, I
did not realize it at the time, but seeing my mother act the way she did had a tremendous
impact on me.

When I started doing internships during school holidays, I soon joined a social organization
which organized children’s summer camps and other recreational activities. The organization,
like many in the social sector, put special emphasis on gender equality and made sure that all
volunteers were onboard with the idea of promoting and living the values of equality
throughout all activities. To me, having attended an international school which placed focus
not only on gender but also on racial equality, this seemed natural. I continued to work for this
organization for a number of years, first as a member of a summer camp team, later as a leader of a team. During the years I had many positive and some negative experiences while working with other people of both genders, sometimes with me being a team member or follower, and sometimes with me being the leader of the group.

I began reflecting on these experiences more and more since the topic of gender and leadership came up during my Bachelors studies in Management and Leadership at the University of Exeter, UK. I felt that applying the theoretical lenses of the leadership lessons I had attended to the situations I had experienced working at the children’s summer camps, proved not only interesting, but at the same time as a great exercise in self-reflection.

Having studied and reflected further on the topic of gender and leadership in the subsequent years, during time spent in different countries and as a student and an employee, I realized that this topic was one that not only I considered important, but one which was getting more and more attention in the academic and media realms. In many ways, it seems to me that neglecting to promote gender equality in the work place and in society in general, parallels to the neglect of racial equality which occurred during the times of Apartheid in South Africa, during which more than 40% of the workforce not being able to find a regular job, as described by Hunman (1996).

All in all during the creation of this thesis, my goal is to take my understanding of gender and leadership to a new level. By carrying out primary research in the form of our questionnaire, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the topic and to, in my own interest as well as in the interest of those who care about the topic, add a bit to our understanding of why and how gender bias in leadership and certain perception can lead to frictions between individuals.

1.3.2.1. My Personal Approach to Leadership

As stated in the previous pages, leadership is an area in which I have had a personal and academic interest for a number of years. As I have grown older and spent more time observing behaviors of those around me as well as myself, it has become more and more obvious to me that emotions play a vital part in our human existence and can affect us in a wide variety of ways. Whilst sometimes one has more or less control over ones emotional makeup, at other times this can be not be done. Consequences can be far reaching and have positive as well as negative impacts. Emotions can also play a role in negotiations – sometimes even a decisive one. In turn negotiations are a key element of leadership (Shakun
Emotions can, of course heavily depending on how well they are contained and managed, make it considerably harder or easier for any given party involved in a negotiation process to achieve a desired outcome. Furthermore, emotions can proof to be a fertile ground for learning about yourself and those around you, whether as part of your professional career or your private life. The article also points out that no matter how effective, efficient or otherwise well-performing an individual is in a certain aspect of his job, this competency does not necessarily reflect on his or her ability to be aware of or, to go a step further, even control their emotions and act in an according manner. Once again, this mismanagement of emotions can have detrimental influence on one’s life, be it in the profession or the private arena.

Next to this, an article I read during my time at Linnaeus University titled “Negotiating with emotions” provided me with further insight into and understanding of this area. One of the main arguments supported by Leary, Pillemer and Wheeler (2013), authors of the above mentioned article, is, that one should not only be aware of one’s emotions, but that these also need to be managed and worked with appropriately to ensure that they can be employed as a useful tool in life and business rather than as a prohibitive blockage. One example the authors give for this theory is the one of a young doctor called Robbins who, as gifted and emotionally controlled a doctor as he was, simply did not have the power to start a conversation about taking time off in order to be part of a training program which would have even enhanced his capabilities as a medical professional. Leary, Pillemer and Wheeler (2013) go on to state that such an aversion to situations of potential conflict can be very costly - both in the long, and in the short run. Another argument that the authors advocate is, that there are three main reasons for why most people experience negotiations as stressful. The reasons are a lack of control, unpredictability and the absence of feedback (Leary, Pillemer and Wheeler, 2013). I reflected upon this dilemma for days after reading the article, and once again felt that being aware of an issue like this is already the first step towards resolving it.

To my mind, the most important concept in the article “Negotiating with emotions” is, that whenever one works with humans, emotions will be involved and there is no way of avoiding them. The only thing one can attempt is to be aware of said emotions, respect them and try to manage them as best as possible. As it can be difficult to read and interpret or even influence the emotions another person is feeling as well as due to the fact that emotions are contagious (Leary, Pillemer and Wheeler, 2013), a good starting point is to try to be aware and a manager of one’s owns emotions.
Another key idea which I have embraced since my first days as a student of leadership is, as Max De Pree (2004, p.108) states in his book *Leadership is an Art*, that a leader must be a great communicator. I fully agree with the statement and in my life as a student, teacher, and employee have felt a variety of positive and negative effects that communication can have. As Leary, Pillemer and Wheeler (2013) show with the example of US American Sports Agent Donald Dell, communication cannot only be used to convey a message, but also to change the mood of a situation from hostile or tense to friendly or simply relaxed. The article *Negotiating with emotions* also made me remember that communication is almost always directly tied to the emotions within the communicating individual.

Communication takes many shapes and forms, be it verbal or non-verbal, and is at the same time highly dependent on the emotions the individual who is trying to communicate feels. As a student in Kalmar, I have not only read about the topic of communication and emotions, but also experienced it first hand, be it standing in front of my colleagues presenting myself, or observing my colleagues when they were presenting. Whilst some of my class mates are happy to be standing in front of their colleagues, sharing the insights they have gained during their reading and group working periods, it was fairly easy to see that others had a harder time, limiting their voices to the absolute minimum, showing signs of stress such as a trembling voice, constant movement of hands or other signs which made me feel uncomfortable watching them. This experience I had is fully in line with Leary, Pillemer and Wheeler (2013) who state that emotions are contagious.

In conclusion, it is my firm belief that communicating well and being aware of and managing emotions are elements at the core of leadership and constitute the basis for any form of successful leadership. The above mentioned arguments, as well as the different experiences I have had as a family member, a student, a friend, a teacher or an employee, in my perception underline that communication and emotions are the keys to every interaction and collaboration taking place between human beings. Whilst emotions and communications both contain challenges and can be a hindrance in certain circumstances, they also act as the vital ingredient that is the salt in the metaphorical soup of life.
1.4. **Future Potential of the Topic**

Next to the many arguments listed above, the stated field of research also holds great potential for future usage, as the number of women in management positions is indeed increasing (Catalyst 2015). Hence, the value of this thesis for us and others entering the workforce in the near future should not be forgotten: With the ever growing amount of attention the leadership and gender topic is receiving, it is bound to be one of the key subjects in decades to come. As it has been argued above, with governments like Germany taking major steps by introducing a mandatory 30% woman’s quota for more than 100 of the country’s largest publicly traded companies (Costa-Roberts 2015), profound changes are anticipated in the future, revealing the prospective potential of the topic. It is and will be extremely interesting to observe how this and other potential governmental acts will shape the future of the topic and what changes will indeed be realized.

Next to the governmental changes that can be anticipated, there will most probably also be a change in cultures and cultural beliefs, norms, values and stereotypes. Already during the last decades and generations a, for example, major change of the role of woman and family occurred - when in the 1970ies, less than 50% of women in the United States with children under the age of 18 worked, the number increased by more than 20% until the last nationwide census in 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Similar statistics can also be found in Europe, as for example the number of mothers actively participating in the labor force reached 66% in 2012 in Germany. These and many other statistics might conclude that the role of women will change further, implying also a general change of image which in turn might be favorable towards a further unison of women and leadership. Moreover, this development might also be favorable for overcoming the glass ceiling for women in business - i.e. “(the) invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational bias” (Mattis, et al. 1998) – which is still a prevailing issue in many companies today. Hence, it can be concluded that leadership and gender holds great potential for future research and constitutes a topic that does imply many likely developments that can be extremely valuable for the generations to come.

As it can be seen from the many different arguments stated throughout the sections above, the research question of gender-related leadership perceptions and attitudes is a majorly interesting, contemporary and omnipresent topic with great potential for in-depth research, a personal involvement and a highly valuable outcome for potential future leaders.
2. The Research Process

2.1. Questionnaire Design

From the first conversation during which we contemplated co-operating for this thesis project, we agreed that some kind of primary data would be a key element in our research. The main reasons for this were that we as authors both felt the need to collect specific data ourselves, thus enabling us to synthesize knowledge based on data that we had collected, checked and evaluated ourselves. As Fulgoni (2014) states, online questionnaires are a leading way of collecting data and account for almost half of all research surveys completed in leading research countries such as the United States of America.

We began the process of designing our questionnaire in late December, whilst we were fully engaged in lectures and other duties incurred in the Management and Leadership in International Context programme in Kalmar. As a first step for creating our own questionnaire, we decided to set a concrete time frame of 4 days, during which we would individually read articles which we considered valuable and relevant to the topic of gender and leadership. At this point, we did not cross check which articles each one of us read, but rather gave ourselves the space and time to explore whatever we wanted to, in order to fully exploit our individual perspectives and ideas of the topic of gender and leadership. We agreed to start out by drafting our questionnaire on paper, finalizing the questions as much as we could and then dealing with the technical implementation of the questions we wanted to ask.

When we met to outline a first draft of our questionnaire, we spent the first 30 minutes talking about the articles we had read, discovering that we both had read some of the same articles, four to be precise, and had both read six articles which the other one had not read. It was interesting to not only discover the different perceptions and interpretations of the articles we had both read, but adding to that the six different articles we had both read, a few core topics soon emerged through discussion and brainstorming. Through a process of regular meetings that we held, three with our Thesis tutor Philippe Daudi, and several meetings of just us, the authors, we kept working on the questionnaire, clarifying wordings, defining and limiting the scope of the questionnaire.

The final version of our questionnaire contained 15 questions and was posted in online forums and professional network groups which are dedicated to the study and practice of leadership (c.f. Appendix, C).
The reasons for us choosing to disseminate our questionnaire online and through the use of professional networks such as LinkedIn and Xing were manifold. First of all, we felt that the largest number of respondents possible would give us the most valid result. Furthermore, we did not want to limit our research to a specific region, as would have been the case with face-to-face interview or even when handing out the questionnaire at a leadership conference or another similar event. Finally, we felt that by targeting special interest groups and forums on the professional networks mentioned above, respondents would have a high interest in the area of leadership and for this reason, combined with their potential experience in the field of leadership in practice as well as research, provide us with the most insightful answers.

The first questions of our questionnaire covered basic data such as gender, age, current employment status as well as whether the respondent attended a university. Next, the questionnaire explored the personal perceptions of leadership of each respondent. The question “Leadership: What does it mean to you? Please state your meaning in only one word” was aimed at giving the respondents the challenge and chance to reduce everything she or he feels and knows about leadership to a single word. Whilst this particular question was a challenge for many respondents, analyzing the answers provided us with a lot of insight into the entire collection of perceptions of and attitudes towards leadership which the respondents have. To make our analysis even further reaching, the follow-up question “We asked you what Leadership means to you. Does the word you stated have a rather female connotation or a rather male connotation to you?” offers further insight into the respondents’ pre-disposition of perceiving leadership with regards to gender. As a next step, the questionnaire required respondents to categorize 11 attributes of leaders, all of the attributes based on academic literature, as either rather strengths of female or as rather strengths of males. No third or “undecided” answer option was given for the sake of clarity. Again, it should be mentioned that this question was perceived as a major challenges by many of those who responded to our questionnaire.

The following question asked respondents to select, in descending order, the three most important leader attributes out of the 11 provided as well as to select the one attribute they consider least important. The second last question of our questionnaire asked: “Would you rather be led by a female leader or by a male leader?” and was immediately followed up with the question: “In your opinion, who makes the better leaders? Females or Males?”. Lastly, respondents were thanked for their participation and asked to submit their E-mail address if
they were interested in potential follow-up interviews. Moreover, respondents of course had the possibility to complete and submit the questionnaire without providing an E-mail address.

Since the topic of gender and leadership received major public attention, we anticipated that respondents might be reluctant to answer polarizing questions such as whether she or he considers an attribute of a leader to be a rather female strength or a rather male strength. To counteract this possible tendency, two measures were put in place: First of all, besides the questions asking respondents to add and identify as rather strengths of females or rather strengths of males and any leader attributes they can think of, all questions must be answered for the respondent to be able to complete and submit the questionnaire. Whilst this undoubtedly led to some individuals not completing the questionnaire, it guaranteed that all those who did completed the questionnaire, provided us as researchers with a complete and valid response to our questions. As a second measure, the following introductory text was displayed to all respondents before the questionnaire could be started:

„As part of our Master Thesis at Linnaeus University in Kalmar, Sweden, we, Valerie Brockman and Andreas Pfleger, are investigating gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards Leadership. All answers are treated in an anonymous and confidential manner under the supervision of Dr. Dr. Philippe Daudi, head of the MSc. Leadership and Management Programme at Linnaeus University. During the following questionnaire we kindly ask you to express your personal feelings regarding the topic Leadership and Gender. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at av.masterthesis@gmail.com.“

By asking respondents to share their personal feelings regarding the topic, we attempted to remove any pressure of giving “correct” or “socially acceptable” answers since feelings are personal and belong to the personae who feels them. Additionally, the questionnaire was completely anonymous, with the exception of asking respondents to voluntarily state their E-mail address if they were interested in taking part in potential follow-up interviews.

Additionally, the following message was displayed before the questionnaire could be started:

“A note on privacy: This survey is anonymous. The record of your survey responses does not contain any identifying information about you, unless a specific survey question explicitly asked for it. If you used an identifying token to access this survey, please rest assured that this token will not be stored together with your responses. It is managed in a separate database and will only be updated to indicate whether you did (or did not) complete this survey. There is no way of matching identification tokens with survey responses. “
2.1.1. Gender Bias in Language

One of the factors which contributed to our interest in the topic of gender and leadership is the gender bias that can be found in language and communication - both in everyday life as well as in the academic field. We believe that it has and had an influence during the design, implementation, as well as evaluation phase of our questionnaire and should therefore be further outlined in the following section:

As Douglas and Sutton (2014) put it, the use of sexist language has the potential to have negative effects on any gender, and through exclusion, ridiculing and trivialization exerts its negative power. Even though, especially in recent years, governments, institutions and organisations have pushed efforts aimed at encouraging the use of non-sexist language as a form of communication, the use of gender biased or sexist language continues to exist in many cultures and across a variety of languages.

In order to be able to reflect upon and, even to the smallest extent, explore the topic of gender and language, we must begin by separately examine the two elements which interact to form this topic: gender for one, and language for the other.

When doing our research on gender and leadership, we found ourselves in accordance with Holmes (2007), who stated that it is a good starting point to contemplate with the distinction between sex and gender. Sociological research, dating back to as early as 1970, has led to the understanding that sex describes the biological differences between males and females, whereas gender is concerned with the socially constructed differences between being feminine and being masculine.

When discussing this perspective, we soon realized that in most of our discussions and conversations with peers, fellow students of leadership, as well as questionnaire respondents, the difference between physiological aspects of being male and female as well as the societal aspect of gender and being considered masculine or feminine, was not given sufficient attention and the topic was rather addressed in a mashed up, undifferentiated manner. In order to align our questionnaire and our research in general with our understanding and sense-making of the sub-topic of gender and language, we only referred to gender rather than also including sexes. It is our belief that by exploring leadership with regards to societal expectations from genders, we are tapping into an area which is often unexamined, subconscious and in general not given then attention it is worth.
To go deeper into this, it should be stated that in research it is generally agreed that gender differences are understood as a central feature of patriarchy, which in turn can be described a social system in which men have come to be dominant in relation to women (Holmes 2007). Douglas and Sutton (2014) also state that in addition to the above described general relevance of the topic of gender bias and sexism in language, recent research projects have indicated that males show less support for the use and promotion of non-sexist language alternatives compared to females. In general terms, it can be said that there is a strong gender-related difference in attitudes towards sexist or gender biased language which, to make matters even more precarious, the research carried out by Douglas and Sutton (2014) pointed towards gender-specific system justification and social dominance orientation as major drivers for this. As a consequence, the correlation between gender and attitudes toward the use of sexist language seems to be driven by broader ideologies that serve to keep women in the place in which apparently at least some members of our society think they belong.

A rather recent development in the field of gender and language took place during our time as students at Linnaeus University in Kalmar, Sweden: As the Guardian (2015), amongst many other widely spread news outlets, reported, the official dictionary of the Swedish language was expanded. Amongst 13.000 other new entries, the pronoun “hen” was added. This pronoun is gender-neutral and can be used in which the gender of the person being referred to is either unknown, does not need to be known or the person is transgender. “Hen” was first used in the 1960s, and after much quickly disappearing initial attention, reappeared in the 2000s, when representatives of trans-gender groups promoted usage of the word. This development shows that Sweden has, in our perception as a research team, understood the role gender-bias plays in the use of everyday language. By adding “hen” to the official dictionary, the word is recognized in a more formal setting which should help to promote its use even further. By promoting gender-neutral language, the Swedish government is not only showing respect and support for trans-gender individuals, but at the same time is also giving individuals an easy way to avoid communications and situations charged with gender bias.

Furthermore, when contemplating language in the context of gender and this thesis, we immediately saw a connection to one of our courses called “Leadership as construct of Meaning”, during which we discovered that in today’s fast moving, ever more globalizing world, it seems that the concept of sensemaking is one that is becoming more important as every single day goes by. The reason for this is that the amount of information, stimuli, communication and interactions we as human individuals are expected, through external as
well as internal pressures and or motivation to deal with, are ever increasing. This means that, since more is being taken in by us humans, especially when living, working, and communicating in more than one language, more selective filtering of what is being taken in needs to take place in order to effectively and efficiently differentiate between what is important and what is not important when it comes to our professional and personal lives, as well as our mere existence as human beings on this planet. As our lecturer Mikael Lundgren (2014) stated in one of his classes: “Human action is not caused by responses to stimuli, but is dependent on the meaning that is ascribed to stimuli, in a proactive process.” This statement clearly underlines the importance of sensemaking.

The concept of sensemaking itself is one that is aptly named. Sensemaking, as described by Weick (1995, p. 4), “literally means the making of sense.” At the heart of this concept of making sense are three elements: The frame of reference, the cue, and the relationship between the first two elements. In simplified terms the frame, or frame of reference which can also be referred to as the paradigm, can be described as the collection of experiences, knowledge and impressions that we have collected through everything we as a human individual have gone through until this very point in time. Since experiences are made over time and one is hardly ever done making or gathering new experiences, one’s frame of reference is constantly evolving. As mentioned in the above paragraph, the large amount of stimuli, information, and/or communications that an individual is subjected to in today’s fast paced global environment, referred to by Weick (1995, p. 2) as “an ongoing flow of events”, play a key role in sensemaking. The reason for this is simple: the larger the amounts of information or stimuli which have to be processed by an individual are, the higher the chances of the occurrence of a cue. Cues can be described as events or a part of information that triggers the individual who perceives it, in order to make sense of it in a certain way. If a discrepant cue, which could also be called a new cue, is perceived, the individual doing so cannot make sense of the said cue, due to a lack of past experience (Weick, 1995). Once again, the nature of cues reoccurring as well as new cues being perceived, contributes to the constantly flowing nature of sensemaking.

As it can be derived from the arguments listed above, gender bias in language is a topic whose importance and influence is easily underestimated. However, with the introduction provided, the understanding of the following insights and results revealed from primary and secondary data throughout this thesis will be eased.
2.2. Questionnaire Implementation

As soon as we were done with drafting our questionnaire on paper, we began exploring the different tools available for digitizing our questionnaire. Through online research as well as conversations with peers in our Management and Leadership in International Context programme, we discovered a number of software tools which, in one way or another, would enable us to distribute our questionnaire online and evaluate our findings in the end.

We once again decided to tackle this challenge from two sides, each one of us taking a closer look at two of the four online questionnaire tools which were most recommended in the online community as well as by our peers. The tools we examined closely were Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, LimeSurvey and Google Forms. When we met to discuss our experiences with the different survey tools, we immediately found out that all of the tools would satisfy our survey needs to a certain extent, whilst none of them would satisfy all of our wishes. With costs for the different survey tools ranging from €0 to €500, this was another factor we had to account for.

We began re-working the questionnaire with the aim of re-aligning the questionnaire with the possibilities the online tools gave us. This process was a rather quick one and we decided that LimeSurvey would allow us to do most of what we wanted to achieve at the lowest cost. After finalizing the questionnaire under the guidance of our thesis tutor, we began building the digital version of the questionnaire. Whilst this was time consuming in the beginning, as soon as we got more accustomed to using the LimeSurvey admin dashboard, we were able to make changes to the questionnaire quickly and eradicate any mistakes within seconds. As soon as we had built our first version of the questionnaire, we tested it on ourselves. We were happy with the first draft of the questionnaire and proceeded to build the second version of our online questionnaire. Following the final Go of our thesis supervisor, we posted the link to our questionnaire in 21 different special interest groups (c.f. Appendix, B). 15 of the groups were part of the LinkedIn professional network, four groups were part of the German professional network Xing, and two groups were part of the Facebook network.
The two Facebook groups were the internal group of the Management and Leadership in International Context students of 2014/2015, while the other Facebook Group was an alumni group of a summer school, one of us thesis authors took part in. As mentioned above, we decided to place our focus on professional groups and refrained from sharing the questionnaire further on Facebook. Of the 15 LinkedIn Groups we posted in, four required admin approval and our post was eventually published a few days after submitting it.

In addition to the above described ways of disseminating our questionnaire amongst individuals’ interest and active in the field of leadership and leadership studies, we decided to contact a number of newsletter publishers dedicated to the topic of leadership. Via online research, we identified a large number of research groups, authors of leadership books, leadership coaches, universities and academic departments which offer dedicated leadership programmes as well as a variety of companies which have graduate programmes aimed at fostering and developing leadership competences. We narrowed down the list we had compiled through researching and discussing website and literary contents of said individuals and eventually contacted 25 individuals and organizations. We received a number of replies of, most of them, especially academic institutions, stating that they could unfortunately not disseminate our research questionnaire amongst their network due to internal guidelines. Nonetheless, several of the organizations and individuals we contacted replied that they had taken the time to complete our survey and were in this way contributing to our research. Furthermore, one monthly US American newsletter sent out by two leadership coaches and authors expressed their interest in our project and informed us that they would be happy to include our questionnaire in their next mailing. Unfortunately the mailing of the newsletter took place at a point in time which was too late for us to wait for the results. Whilst this is of course a pity, the delay in sending the newsletter is of course understandable as the two authors have busy schedules and we as a research team were also working with a concrete deadline.

All in all, the response rate to our efforts was rather disappointing, with most of the recipients not replying to our message with further attempts of reaching out to said organizations and individuals via phone or E-Mail not leading to any further results. It should also be mentioned that contacting organizational leadership development programmes such as the ones offered by SAAB, Caterpillar, Unilever, Chevron and Mars proved to be the least accessible, with website integrated application tools being their chosen way of recruiting candidates and
usually no E-Mail address supplied for further questions or inquiries about the leadership programme.

2.3. The Merit of Open Questions in our Questionnaire

During an early stage of our thesis work, we aimed at finding an appropriate research question that would suit both our interests and relevance in the field of leadership. We pretty early agreed upon the chosen topic for the reasons stated in a previous section of the thesis at hand. Yet, in order to gather relevant and interesting data to derive theory, there are numerous possibilities which also had to be evaluated for its usage during our research.

We, as a team, decided to utilize a questionnaire, revealing first hand data about the gender specific perceptions of and attributes towards key leadership functions. Yet, during the design phase, we came across many possibilities on how to effectively design a questionnaire in order to derive such data necessary for our work.

In this section, we aim at further outlining the merit of open questions in questionnaires as we did. The final version as it can be found in the appendix of the thesis at hand (c.f. Appendix, C) shows, that one of our first questions already constitutes the following text: “Leadership: What does it mean to you? Please state your meaning in only one word”. This open question is the result of a collaborative work between us as a team as well as our supervisor Dr. Daudi. We all agreed that such open question leaves the respondents room for their own imagination and interpretation of the question. It is also strategically placed at the very beginning of the questionnaire, as at this point, the questioned person is still “free” of bias from other questions connected to leadership. This inference was important to us as we were aiming at finding very personal and honest notions of leadership from our respondents. Moreover, we believe that leadership is a highly complex and multifaceted topic consisting of numerous ways on how to be interpreted and therefore it is interesting for us to see how respondents think about the given topic. This idea is also supported by Margaret Stacey in her book Methods of Social Research (1985, p. 80), where she states that “Open-ended questions are used where the issue is complex, where relevant dimensions are not known, and where a process is being explored”. In our opinion, this statement is applicable to our research method of using open questions and a suitable approach on how to reveal personal notions from respondents on the topic of leadership. Moreover, we also agree with her arguments that open questions are mostly much more labor-intensive – not only during the design process, as they need to be
very well elaborated in order to receive the desired outcome, but also during the evaluation process. Yet as Stacey outlines, open questions also prevent respondents from giving “stereotyped” answers (1985, p. 80).

In conclusion it can be seen, that the merit of open questions can be beneficial if used in an appropriate manner and if the question is asked in a reasoned way. It is crucial to not frustrate the respondent but rather triggering her imagination and personal notion about a given question. In our case, the question “Leadership: What does it mean to you? Please state your meaning in only one word” leaves space for a very personal interpretation but at the same time, it requires a deeper thought about the issue as respondents are asked to write down their interpretation in only one word. This is also a supportive addition to the open questions as it, in most cases, prevents respondents to answer in unhelpful ways that cannot be evaluated (University of Bristol 2013). However, we do believe that the mixture of open and closed questions is the, for us, most efficient way in order to gather first hand data revealing interesting insights about the topic of leadership.

2.4. **Respondent’s Feedback**

Upon dissemination of our research questionnaire, we received a rather large number of E-Mails, direct messages and comments from respondents. As mentioned in the earlier sections of this thesis, we distributed the research questionnaire through a number of different channels, all aimed at reaching individuals who have had a high degree of exposure to the topic of leadership through their professional lives as well as through academic study.

In general, the respondent feedback we received can be grouped in two categories: Category one was feedback in which respondents expressed their support for our choice of topic, voiced their interest in hearing about our findings and congratulated us on venturing into an up-to-date, relevant and important topic. Many of those who contacted us also provided further resources; referring us to research projects they themselves had carried out, recommending articles, books and other academic materials such as theoretic models, which they as respondents, students and practitioners of leadership found relevant and interesting. Additionally, some respondents took the time to outline to us their experiences in working in the field of leadership and their understanding and sense making of the topic of gender in the realm of leadership. Receiving such positive and inspiring feedback like the kind described above definitely encouraged us in our efforts and served as a motivating factor. Most of the
category one kind of feedback we got was in the form of E-mails and direct messages as well as individual postings in the special interest groups in which we shared the link to our research questionnaire (c.f. Appendix, D).

The second category of feedback we received can be described as much at least equally as impactful and important for our research process. A number of individuals expressed that they felt that our research topic was relevant and important, but that our questionnaire was too one-sided and forced respondents to make choices they did not feel comfortable with or even able to make at all. Surprisingly, at least for us as a research them, this feedback was in the vast majority of cases, directly referring to the questionnaire part which required respondents to categorize 11 attributes of leaders, all of the attributes based on academic literature, as either rather strengths of female or as rather strengths of males. As explained earlier already, we decided not to offer a third or “undecided” answer option. It is our firm belief that, even though they might be unconscious, through exposure to mass media, educational systems, academic literature as well as societal standards and expectations in general, each and every human being most likely has a gender biased understanding of language and the roles he or she expects males or females to fulfill.

However, it should be said that the feedback we received, especially the one constructively criticizing the missing choices when it comes to gender-related attributes, opened a whole new view on the topic and revealed a notion that we did not expect or rather detected before: When it comes to taking a decision of whether certain attributes are either female or male connoted, some people feel, metaphorically speaking, tied into a corner which naturally leads to pressure, frustration and even resentment. Yet, this outcome is indeed extremely help- and insightful for us as researchers of the field of gender and leadership, as it shows how emotionally tied people are to the topic. As it’s been said before, we did not, in any case, expect this sort of feedback and are even more positively surprised by the outcome and the implications this will have for the final outcome of our research. In our opinion, the responses and voices received require special attention, especially when it comes to evaluating the findings of our questionnaire. We do highly appreciate the opinions and notions and do believe that it might also reveal some deeply rooted frustration about the everlasting stereotypes on female and male leader attributes.

One might also assume that this is one of the first steps into an era, where attributes cannot “naturally” being matched to females or males anymore. This presumption can be of high value during the evaluation of our questionnaire findings, as it might lead us as researches to a
whole new direction. In this context, we moreover regard the findings of our questionnaire as a chance, to overcome our own stereotypes and rooted notions on the topic and appreciate new insights and findings that influence our personal mind-sets substantially.

As Eikenberry and Harris on several occasions mention in their book *From Bud to Boss*, leadership is not an easily understood or explained topic and there is no way around gaining the experience, practice and knowledge one has to have to be a leader (Eikenberry & Harris 2011, p. 5). This is a point that we believe in and we as a cohort have discussed throughout the different enactments, discussions and conversations that we were part of during our time at Linnaeus University. It is our belief that this perspective also applies to the leadership and language dimension of sense-giving and sense-making - Leadership as seen through the lenses of sense-making and sense-giving, can be explained as an individual’s ability to successfully influence or steer the perception and definition of reality of a group of individuals (Lundgren, 2014). In this case, the individual doing the steering is the leader and the group of individuals whose understanding of reality is influenced are the followers.

One of the biggest challenges in sense-giving are the different frames of references that followers will undoubtedly hold. Each individual human being, as a result of upbringing, education, social influences, and any other kind of experience made in the past, will have a unique way of perceiving and interpreting, or in this case more specifically making sense of, reality. This concept is called counter realities (Lundgren, 2014). Hence, one must be careful not to forget the leaders, or sense-giver’s reality in this context.

Another principle that comes to mind when contemplating sense-giving in leadership is that of communication. Since day one of our academic program, as we have mentioned earlier in this thesis already, it has seemed that the importance of communication in leadership cannot be overstated. As Max De Pree (2004, p.108) states in his book *Leadership is an Art*, a leader must be a great communicator.

This notion was also supported by Lundgren (2014) in his lecture. We both wholeheartedly agree with the above statement and in our lives as students, teachers, daughters and sons as well as employees have felt a variety of positive and negative effects that communication can have. In order to avoid a negative outcome or even complete failure in sense-giving, a leader must not only use a suitable variety of the communication channels available, but he or she must also be well aware of his or her own frame of reference. This is necessary in order to be able to successfully formulate and convey communications that trigger the desired kind of
sense-making in the followers (Lundgren 2014). This can be compared to the classic communication dilemma that is inherent in encoding/decoding (Hall, et al., 1980).

However, it has to be mentioned that leaders do not only carry out their sense-giving through communication, but a large part of sense-giving can also be achieved by actions (Lundgren 2014) that the leader takes in everyday company, and even private life.

Another key point which has been re-appearing during our entire time at Linnaeus University and during our discussions and meetings around this thesis is, that leaders do not have to be leaders in an organizational or job-title fulfilling sense. Opinion leaders in a manufacturing company might not be found at a board meeting but rather on the production floors. This is also, if not especially, true for sense-giving.

2.5. Questionnaire Respondents – The Basics

The first page of the online questionnaire we devised and disseminated was concerned with asking those who were answering the questions about personal information. By recording basic data of questionnaire respondents we were not only gathering data that was interesting and important to us as researchers, but we also ensured that those who took the time to reply to our questions had an easy start, not being forced to reflect on the challenging issue of leadership and gender right away, rather simply looking back to remember basic data as a starting point. We asked for the respondent’s gender, age, current employment situation as well as whether he or she had attended a university with or without the award of a degree (c.f. Appendix, p. C). However, before we venture into exploring the details of the data gathered through our questionnaire, some basic analysis of the simple data we collected should be carried out to establish a clear image of those who completed the questionnaire. This approach will enable us, as well as the readers of this thesis, to put the research findings into a context and judge the validity of our research findings. Moreover, it should be noted that the results of the questionnaire that are presented as a percentage amount and rounded to the next integer. All data collected through our research questionnaire was exported from LimeSurvey in form of an excel spreadsheet. All evaluation and analysis of the mentioned data was also carried out utilizing excel.

First off, we will look at the age of those who replied to our questionnaire. Whilst we did ask respondents to enter a number digitally, we felt that grouping respondents into age groups was a much simpler and direct way of displaying the information. We felt that by recording exact
digits we would accumulate more precise data than if we had asked respondents to select the corresponding age group.

At the same time we felt that preserving our liberty to interpret and depict the collected data in whichever way we felt most suitable and useful was an added bonus of collecting specific ages.

As can be seen from the graph above, 59% of questionnaire respondents fall into the age group of 18 to 34. At the same time, 30% of respondents were in the range of the two next highest age groups, covering 35 to 54 years of age. With 11% of respondents being aged 55 and older, the entirety of questionnaire respondents is covered. We as researchers are extremely satisfied with the derived age spread. Whilst there is a majority of questionnaire respondents in the two lowest age groups, we feel that by especially keeping our selected method of dissemination in mind - almost exclusively postings on social media websites on the internet - the above presented numbers are more than satisfactory.

Additionally to this, our emphasis on sharing the questionnaire in special interest groups, with the aim of reaching people who had either studied leadership as an academic subject or had a significant amount of experience with leadership and leadership roles in a professional environment, the balance amongst the age groups becomes even clearer, with young people having a higher propensity to use social networks.

Whilst we as a research team did not have a specific target in mind when it comes to respondents and their age distribution, we were hoping to have at least some input from
individuals across a wider variety of ages. We have definitely achieved this and therefore feel more than satisfied when it comes to the bandwidth of age in questionnaire respondents.

When talking about the gender of our questionnaire respondents, we once again did not have a clear goal, or rather hope, in mind. Of course, from the start we felt that our research results would be must conclusive if males and females answered them to similar or identical degrees, however we soon realized that by having an imbalance when it comes to gender and responses, this would again give us an interesting insight into the topic of gender and leadership and allow us to make deductions.

Nonetheless, as the graph above depicts, we achieved an almost perfect balance, with 55% of questionnaire respondents being females and 45% being males. One thought that did however cross our minds, is a potential explanation for the 10% gender gap: As mentioned in the section on gender and language, females are in general much more aware of the issue of gender biased language and are much more likely to be willing to take corrective measures, such as using gender neutral language.

This is true whilst at the same time males often do not perceive or see the issue of gender biased language and consequently do not consciously make effort to use gender neutral language. We therefore conclude, that for the same reason – i.e. females being more aware of
the issues and complications surrounding gender and leadership - leading to a higher rate of response to our questionnaire by females. To further support this theory, it should be stated that all questionnaire postings on social media used the headline “Gender and Leadership – a research project” which immediately pointed towards the topic of our thesis project.

Another metric which we discussed a lot before deciding to include it in our thesis questionnaire, was the rate of university attendance amongst questionnaire respondents. The reasons for doing so were manifold. First, we ourselves have experienced a transformation within ourselves, mainly with regards to how we process and interpret information since becoming students at University level. For both of us, having time to read and reflect upon complex issues such as the topic of leadership, has always been a challenging but at the same time extremely rewarding experience. As we have learned about frames of references and expanding them through gaining knowledge and experiences, we were convinced that having attended a University - with or without the award of an academic degree - influences an individual’s procession of information. When it comes to the topic of leadership, we have explored that there are a number of academic progress dedicated - in total or at least partially - to the study of leadership. The following graph reveals the degree to which the respondents of our questionnaire attended University:

![University Attendance Graph](image-url)

*Graph 4 - Questionnaire respondents' rate of university attendance*
As it can be seen, 95% of respondents indeed attended a University. We believe that this fact underlines the validity of our research findings in some way, but also weakens them at the same time. Since we distributed our questionnaire in special interest groups, some of which were specifically dedicated to the study of leadership in academic environments, we believe that at least a part of our questionnaire respondents studied leadership in academic setting.

However, with 95% percent of questionnaire respondents having enjoyed university education at least for some time, the scope of our research findings is somewhat limited too. By excluding for example manufacturing laborers who are not in need of university education to effectively and efficiently fulfill their job roles, their perspective is not represented in our thesis. Nonetheless, the validity of this thesis is still given, especially since from the beginning onwards we had aimed our survey at individuals who studied leadership as an academic science as well as those who have leadership positions in a professional environment. Since most leadership positions require at least some university education, the high percentage of questionnaire respondents who attended university is merited.

The final portion of the analysis of basic data we collected deals with the current employment situation of the questionnaire respondents. The main reason for us recording this metric is, as explained in the previous paragraph, that we aimed our questionnaire mainly at individuals who studied leadership as an academic science as well as those who have leadership positions in a professional environment. By asking questionnaire respondents about their current employment situation, we believe we are at least somewhat able to judge how relevant the
answers given by questionnaire respondents are. As the graph below shows, 74% of respondents currently have a job. For us as researchers this means that the majority of these 74% are most likely dealing with leadership in some way, shape or form on a daily basis in the capacity of their jobs. We believe that this underlines the validity of the research findings presented in this thesis.
3. Leadership - A Definition

"A manager takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go, but ought to be." (Carter, 2015)

-- Rosalynn Carter

"Leadership revolves around vision, ideas, direction, and has more to do with inspiring people as to direction and goals than with day-to-day implementation. A leader must be able to leverage more than his own capabilities. He must be capable of inspiring other people to do things without actually sitting on top of them with a checklist.”

-- Warren Bennis

"Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good."

(Ciulla, 2014) -- Joanne Ciulla

“To do great things is difficult; but to command great things is more difficult.”

-- Friedrich Nietzsche

“Don’t follow the crowd, let the crowd follow you.”

-- Margaret Thatcher

“Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to high sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations.”

-- Peter Drucker

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

-- Margaret Mead
When it comes to leadership and finding a suitable definition for such a complex, diverse and multifaceted phenomenon, opinions and argumentations could not deviate more: neither in academia, in the mainstream media, in scientific researches, in educational institutions, in business, nor in any other field, a universally accepted or consistent definition can be found. The inspirational quotes on the page above are testament to this perception which we as researchers share. For this reason, within the following sections of this thesis, we are aiming at elaborating our personal definition of leadership based on secondary literature such as scientific articles and research findings, as well as on our own findings and insights derived from the above described questionnaire. The result will be a definition based on our understanding, knowledge and expertise within the field of leadership with the objective of providing a harmonious comprehension for both – us as the authors of this research project as well as for the reader.

3.1. The Scientific Approach

The term leadership depicts a combination of the word (to) lead + -ship, whereas (to) lead originates from the old English word “lædere”, reinterpreted “someone who leads, guides” (Harper 2014). Cognate roots can also be found in the Scottish language (“ledar”), in the West Frisian language as “lieder”, in Dutch (“leider”), in the German language as “Leiter”, in Danish ("leder"), in Swedish as “ledare” as well as in Icelandic as “leiðari” (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 2015). As it can already be surmised from the origin of the term and the meaning itself - to guide, to lead, to direct and other paraphrases - the denotations and implications are extremely wide and multifaceted just like the study of leadership itself. As there are many different ways and ideas on how to interpret and give meaning to the term, naturally the quantity of scientific research projects and publications is tremendous. Therefore, a method on how to narrow down the huge amount of sources to the, for this thesis, most crucial literature, was required. As a matter of fact, we elaborated our own understanding of a leadership definition through open and selective coding following the Grounded Theory, short GT, first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. The GT in general depicts a very valuable methodological tool, enabling researchers like us to strategically derive theory from data (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Thus, through the process of exposing, conceptualizing, and incorporating data, the actual theory can be developed (Corbin & Strauss 1998, p. 3).
3.1.1. The Early Beginning of Leadership Approaches

Following the methods of GT, different theoretical approaches of leadership need to be considered in order to develop a personal definition: Moving back to the 19th century, the ideology of leaders and leadership became a widely spread and popular phenomenon especially shaped and characterized by Thomas Carlyle and his famous On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic History (1840) as well as by Sir Francis Galton’s Hereditary Genius: An inquiry into its laws and consequences (1870).

In Carlyle’s work, he illustrates or rather praises figures of the past that he calls the Great Men. Carlyle points out their marvelous achievements and noble deeds for society (1840). What stands out from his work and is highly interesting with regards to finding a possible definition of leadership is, that Carlyle accentuates certain behaviours and character traits, alongside landmark points in their biographies, which all the Great Men have in common [“Universal history consists essentially of their united Biographies” (1840, p. 291)] as well as the argument that those Great Men are mostly given their power and status by birthright (e.g. Napoleon, Muhammad). This seems logical as during the 19th century, it was very uncommon, or rather almost impossible, for people from lower societal groups to become an influential leader (Cherry 2015). However, this finding and the argument that all great men share similar biographies, points towards the direction that leaders, or as he calls them, heroes, are rather born than made. This impression becomes even more clear when analyzing the work of Sir Francis Galton (1870) during the same era, who clearly states that leader attributes and characteristics are inherited – “I purpose to show in this book that a man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world” (1870, p. 1).

Hence, the early publications and scientific approaches towards a definition of leadership, such as the works of Carlyle and Galton, might denote leadership as consisting of certain characteristics that are inherited rather than developed. What this might imply for the purpose of finding a suitable definition of leadership in the context of gender is, that there are most probably indeed certain characteristics which constitute leadership and which might be utilized for describing the phenomenon. However, what is interesting to see here is that there is no evidence at all for women to be considered as leaders. Hence, for a definition it can be inferred that there is a necessity of clearly exposing potential gender differences or, if there are none, to explicitly state that the attributes, if any, constituting leadership, are not directly connected to gender.

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However, the above stated arguments merely provide a first glimpse into the numerous approaches on finding a – for this thesis – suitable definition of leadership. Where Carlyle and Galton supplied a starting point for research and the view on leadership within society, later scholars changed this notion:

3.1.2. The Research Development of Leadership

After the first era of researching leadership, other scholars also aimed at discovering approaches on how to explain the phenomenon. During the mid 20th century, researches were conducted which mainly revealed attributes and certain traits connected to leadership. Especially the works of Bird (1940), Jenkins (1947) and Stogdill (1948) gained popularity as all of them conducted observatory studies revealing behavioral patterns and differences between the probands, known as the trait theory (Van Wart 2003, p. 218). However, what protruded here was the tremendous number of different traits the researchers discovered (Bader, et al. 2004, p. 105). These findings and insights did not only serve as a basis for later evaluation and categorization of the discovered attributes, but also as a turn in leadership research: as the many different characteristics revealed, leadership was no longer perceived an inherited quality - as asserted by Carlyle and Galton and their Great Men Theory - but based on characteristic traits (Bader, et al. 2004, p. 105, Isaac Mostovicz, et al. 2009). However during the next years, this approach was further elaborated as it became apparent that the large amount of attributes could not be consistently traced, which in turn made the discovery of patterns impossible (Bader, et al. 2004). Therefore, the focus shifted to situational variables as the research of Stogdill (1948 in Bass & Bass 2008, p. 95) revealed: “(…) persons who are leaders in one situation may not necessarily be leaders in other situations”.

Ensuing from these insights, the development of leadership research certainly did not stop after the mid 20th century but further approaches evolved such as the contingency theory introduced by the industrial and organizational psychologist Fred Fiedler in 1967 (Hoffman-Miller 2013): “Contingency theory postulates there is no one best way to lead an organization and that leadership style is acutely matched to various situations in management. Contingency theory bears similarities to situational theory, both of which are in contrast to the scientific management theories (…)”. As it can be derived, this approach focuses mainly on the situation where leadership takes place and therefore entails a rather behavioral approach other than past research findings focusing on traits (Van Wart 2003, p. 218). Contingency theory casts a new light on leadership research as scholars approached cause and effect of certain
behaviors on company effectiveness. The major insights were gained from different situations and the varied behavioral patterns of leaders. Especially the finding that the same leader might act different in different situations was an unprecedented discovery. In this context, Fred Fiedler identified two major leadership styles, where leaders are either task or relationship motivated. He then developed the so-called Least preferred CoWorker Model (LCP) which depicts a scale measuring certain characteristics that either stimulate or detain the effectiveness of a leader (Hoffman-Miller 2013). During the following years, his findings served as a base for further researches and elaborations of his model. Yet, in order to find a proper definition of leadership, the further chronicle of research theory can provide interesting insights, such as the era of transformational leadership.

Drawing on the findings gained from contingency theory, transformational leadership - as first coined by American sociologist James Victor Downton Jr. and later formalized by American biographer and political scientist James MacGregor Burns - depicts a leadership style where the leader “…exhibits established behaviors, including embracing a large-scale vision of the organization, exerting great effort in the achievement of goals, and performing beyond specified expectations. Transformational leadership qualities are considered to be learned and developed behaviors” (Flynn 2009). As it can be derived from the word itself as well as from the stated definition, a transformational leader is able to transform subordinates or followers to increase efforts for a common goal by their own choice. Through the utilization of certain attributes, followers are encouraged to act in a particular way (Flynn 2009). What is interesting here is, that this approach is still adaptable and in active use today and might be a highly valuable impulse for finding a suitable definition for the thesis at hand. As we are aiming at finding gender specific perceptions of and attributes towards key leadership functions, connecting effective leadership to attributes as the transformational approach suggests might depict a very interesting step towards finding a suitable definition for our purpose.

However, when discussing transformational leadership, transactional leadership theory also needs to be illustrated as the two approaches are interrelated: Especially during the late 20th century, transformational and transactional leadership reached a high level of popularity within society. From now on, leaders were classified into either deploying a transformational or a transactional style, where the later can be described as a method where leaders “(…) motivate their followers in the direction of the stated goals by clarifying work role and task requirements.
Transaction leadership is a common management style that involves a chain of command and defined structure in which subordinates relinquish authority to their supervisors” (Flynn 2009).

During the following years and up until today, the two approaches outlined above are still being applied, yet as a matter of fact, scholars further developed and elaborated the models and additional categories were added in order to reach the best possible fit to their research findings (Bass & Bass 2008, p. 42). What can be drawn from the researches initiated by Downtown and further developed and formalized by Burns and many other later scholars is, that leadership is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that does not only occur in organizational contexts, but in any situation where groups emerge. It is interesting to see that an approach developed more than 40 years ago is still valid and used. Moreover, also the insight that one approach serves as the basis and starting point for a tremendous number of follow-up studies and researches, which reveal more and more valuable findings about a complex topic like leadership, also is inspiring and motivational for further commitment and research projects such as this thesis.

As it can be seen from the history and early beginnings of leadership research theory, it was and still is a popular and greatly discussed topic, triggering many scholars to conduct further research. The above stated arguments show that leadership has insightful roots; however, what is most striking for us, investigating the field of leadership and gender, is that there is no evidence of the role of women or any other indicators of female leaders in the history of leadership research. Especially the early beginnings, i.e. the Great Men Theory, clearly state already by name, that all remarkable leaders were male. Naturally, the next step for us as curious investigators of gender and leadership is the time, event or any other mark – if any – where females were noticeably mentioned in the research of leadership theory.

3.1.3. Females in Leadership Theory

As argued in the sections above, leadership theory and its early researches date back to the mid-19th century, where Thomas Carlyle first coined the term in research with his Great Men Theory (Carlyle 1840). Next to being popular within society, leaders also enjoyed status, fame and admiration, which yet constituted a privilege merely citizens from renowned family backgrounds could reach. However, the privilege was not only reserved for nobles, but for their male family members exclusively.
As our research of leadership history reveals, no explicit evidence of female leaders can be found in the reviewed literature up until the 1970s, when numerous scholars published researches in the field of women in leadership (cf. Chapman & Luthans 1975, Brown 1979, Corwin 1974, Lockheed 1976). What is interesting here is that, for instance, Chapman and Luthans already concluded in 1975, that the role of women in the workforce changed and an increasing number of females were represented in leadership positions. Moreover, they list recent improvements and innovations which aimed at supporting the underrepresentation of females in leader positions, such as the advancement of education for women, a change of cultural beliefs and notions concerning the role of females and numerous other arguments (p. 173).

Next to Chapman and Luthans, Stephen M. Brown comes up with similar arguments in his article *Male versus Female leaders: A comparison of empirical studies*, published in 1979, where he also argues for women in management positions and the struggles they have to face. He even goes into the direction of sexual discrimination as well as the pressure female managers have to deal with (p. 595). However, highly interesting insights that can be grasped from his publication are, that he already recognized the widely spread stereotyping within society when it comes to traditional leadership notions and the necessity of breaking these. He argues for the need of further research in order to reveal female leadership abilities and the application of these in organizations (p. 596).

Contemplating these arguments that were elaborated and published already more than 40 years ago, obviously, at least for us, the question of why these issues are still unsolved, rises. Moreover, it almost seems unreal that insights gained from articles published more than four decades ago are still extremely popular; indeed, they could not be more up-to-date with, as mentioned before, Germany just very recently introducing a quota for women in executive positions (Miller & Smale 2015). Possible reasons for this surprisingly slow development of women in leadership positions are extremely diverse, as the number of articles and other publications on the topic show. Yet, this also indicates that it is almost impossible to come up with a universally accepted and recognized answer for this question. As our insights from readings, lectures, and other past experiences show, we believe that a potential answer might be the stereotypes of leaders as naturally being male that still prevail in within society. These stereotypes are so deeply rooted in our minds that naturally a change can only happen gradually over time.
Gender and Leadership – A Definition

The development and notion of male and female leaders is also related to culture and cultural beliefs, norms and values: as for example Geert Hofstede’s *Masculine versus Feminine Dimension of National Culture* infers, one of the six National Culture dimensions representing attributes that can be applied to typical behavioral patterns of certain cultures, attributes that are assumed to be masculine are “achievement, heroism, assertiveness, material rewards for success (and competitiveness)” (The Hofstede Centre 2015). What is interesting here is that these attributes are naturally associated with males and leadership, yet considering the typical attributes that are named *Female* are “(…) preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life” which are not necessarily all connected to leaders. However, what we want to convey here is that these notions of naturally associated male and female attributes might be one of the major causes for the slow development of women in leadership positions.

Moreover, not only this example reveals the differences and still prevailing stereotypes of males and females, but also the strong role of gender in certain cultures: as commonly known, the rights of women in the MENA region (Arab Middle East and North Africa) are still showing extremely high degrees of inequality compared to males, even being “(…) relegated to the status of second-class-citizens” (Freedom House 2005, p. 1). The major problem is the lack of the actual execution of governmental regulations, as these countries did indeed include major rights for women in the legislation, however, they are not actively being applied by state authorities (Freedom House 2005, p. 2). Moreover, also the fear of speaking up is reasoned as incidents from the past like female activists driving around in cars filming themselves and subsequently getting arrested show (Aljazeera 2014). There are numerous other examples revealing the lack of women’s rights and the prevailing stereotype of male leaders, yet, for the purpose of this thesis the listed arguments show very insightful outcomes that can be effectively used for finding a – for this thesis - suitable definition of leadership in the context of gender.

In conclusion it can be said, that all the arguments outlined above reveal interesting discoveries about the history and evolution of leadership research and especially about the development of females in this context. The insights show that particularly the field of gender related leadership is a rather slowly developing and demanding subject, requiring time and effort to actually bring on notably changes. So far, the gained insights lead us to defining leadership as a phenomenon being influenced by different eras and already existing studies in the according field.
However, not only the scientific approach should matter to us as researchers of leadership in the context of gender, but also our own findings stemming from our personally designed questionnaire will certainly reveal interesting and enlightening results that will help us further narrowing down what leadership is about. Hence, the following section will outline and illustrate in detail, what respondents of our survey answered and what can be inferred from the results.

3.2. The Questionnaire Approach

As it’s been said before, the following pages will illustrate the findings concerning a possible definition of leadership in the context of gender, based upon data collected through the questionnaire we designed, disseminating it through postings in professional social networks such as LinkedIn or the German pendant Xing. Therefore, answers are stemming from respondents who are actually somehow involved in leadership or leadership research. The vast amount of feedback and responses we received further approved the popularity and interest in the topic of gender and leadership, and provided us with much motivation and energy for our research.

When we first came up with the idea of including the “one word meaning of leadership” question in our online research questionnaire during one of our tutoring session with Prof. Dr. Dr. Philippe Daudi, our tutor mentioned the concept of semiotics to us. As we both had not heard of semiotics before, we were interested in finding out more about it. It should be mentioned however, that during our further process of designing and implementing our research questionnaire, semiotics drifted outside of our scope and we did not investigate the topic further. As a result of our final seminar and the associated feedback, our thesis tutor reminded us of the topic. We were immediately reminded of our interest in the topic and the potential merit of adding it to our thesis. This process gave us, combined with the insights gained from the other feedback we got, a rush of energy for the last mile – finishing off our thesis and polishing it a bit more during our last week as students.

As we immersed ourselves in the topic, we immediately found ourselves agreeing with Daudi (1993, p.61), who stated that the complexity and inherent risk of misunderstanding in the wide variety and large number of discourses which we as humans have in today’s world. When it comes to discourse, Daudi (1993, p.67) further explains that to fully understand a discourse, which is differentiated from language itself, we must not only look at the discourse itself but
also examine where it comes from, the frames of reference which at the same time limit and enable it, as well as other norms and rules which have potential impact on then discourse. With semiotics being a vast topic, it should be said that due to time constraints we could only dive into the topic to a certain degree. However we as researchers felt that doing so enabled us to analyse our research findings more thoroughly, which in turn helped us go gain a better understanding of the topic of gender and leadership.

Semiotics, as described by Hamel (2011) is the study of sign processes. This means that the discipline is interested in symbols, signs, indications, likeness, analogies and metaphors - only to name a few. With semiotics being closely related to the field of linguistics and the relevance of language for our research topic being explained in the respective part of this thesis, it becomes obvious why our thesis supervisor pointed us into the direction of this topic.

Therefore in our perception, the “one word leadership meaning” question was a particularly challenging one for our respondents. It forced each of them to choose a word as a symbol which best represents all of her or his beliefs and opinions on and about the topic of leadership. In other words, the “one word leadership meaning” is the signifier, as explained as a concept in semiotics by Berger (2013), and the experiences, impressions, and beliefs that the respondents have “bundled” into said word, is the signified (Berger 2013). Hence, after having grasped this concept thanks to our original readings on semiotics, we immediately felt that having read about this discipline which we had never heard about before enabled us to better understand and analyze the data we had collected.

Therefore, in order to clarify our further working procedure, the following picture shows a screenshot of the question we asked in order to find out what respondents think about the term leadership:

![Image 1 – Leadership: What does it mean to you?](Image_1_-_Leadership_What_does_it_mean_to_you.png)
As it can be seen in the picture, respondents were asked to state their personal understanding about leadership in one word. With this question, we aimed at building upon the insights gained in the sections before; trying to find a possible answer to what a definition of leadership in the context of gender is about. For us as researchers, the findings will be interesting with regard to the diversity of answers as well as a possible link to the stated meanings and gender. The following word cloud summarizes the findings from our questionnaire, i.e. the user submitted meanings of leadership:

Image 2 – Word Cloud One: User submitted meanings of Leadership

The word cloud as illustrated in Image 2 shows the, in total, 77 different “one word meanings” of the term leadership, which were submitted by the respondents of our questionnaire. However, the total amount of respondents who delivered an answer to this question was 166, which means that certain meanings were stated more frequently than others. Therefore, this frequency can be connected to the size of the terms illustrated in the word cloud, which means that for example the large size of the term responsibility indicates that it was stated by a larger amount of respondents. In contrast, the very small illustrations of terms such as decisiveness, teamwork, mentoring or prudence represents that these words were each merely named by one respondent.
What is interesting here is that around 46% of the respondents thought of different meanings when reflecting on the term leadership. For us as researchers, this number is quite expressive and marks a surprising connection to what we have already discovered during the research of the history of leadership theory: throughout the last century, it seems that the development of leadership theory came to many turning points, where completely new approaches and strategies on how to make sense of the phenomenon of leadership emerged (e.g. the great men theory versus the trait approach). Putting the many different meanings stated by the respondents in the context of the many different findings and directions of leadership theory, it might be inferred that there is no universal definition when it comes to leadership and its true meaning or what it, as a process, encompasses. Indeed, this finding might rather imply that leadership needs room for each and everyone’s personal understanding of it, ultimately not allowing for a general, universally applicable and accepted definition.

Next to these very insightful and interesting findings concerning the meaning of leadership stemming from the questionnaire answers, it might also be rewarding to pay attention to the dispersion of gender of the respondents. For reasons of simplification, the following graphs will only display the top six stated meanings of leadership stated by questionnaire respondents, these six being: responsibility, inspiration, influence, trust, direction, and vision.

**Top 6 respondent submitted leadership meanings and the respondents' gender**

![Graph 6 – Top 6 submitted leadership meanings and the respondents’ gender](image_url)
As it can be seen in Graph 6, the top mentioned “one word meaning” of leadership was *responsibility* with a total amount of 13 answers and a majority of female respondents. It is interesting to see, that from all the respondents filling out the questionnaire, responsibility is the meaning that was named most often. Especially against the backdrop of our personal in-depth reflection on the meaning of leadership, which did not primarily, but rather secondarily addressed responsibility as a major attribute connected to the phenomenon; these findings are highly valuable and bestow us with new and very insightful knowledge. Moreover, when investigating the dispersion of females and males who stated one of the top mentioned personal notions on leadership as their personal understanding, connections between the stated word and respondents’ gender can be found:

![Graph 7](image)

*Graph 7 - Top 6 submitted leadership meanings, the respondents’ gender and their connotation about the stated word*

When looking at the word *responsibility*, it can be seen that in total ten females and three males stated this as their opinion on what leadership means to them. However, as a sub-question of what leadership means to each respondent, we also asked if the stated word has a rather female or rather male connotation. The results of this can be found in the above displayed Graph 7: as it can be seen, out of the ten females stating the word responsibility, five connected it with a rather female connotation, and four females connected it with a rather male connotation. When now looking at the total of three males stating responsibility as their
notion of leadership, also the majority of them connected it to have the same connotation as their own gender, namely male.

Furthermore, the following top five respondent submitted meanings of leadership as well as all other stated words within the word cloud deliver similar results: on average, 59% of females declared their stated meaning of leadership as having a female connotation, whereas 41% of males declared their stated word as having a female connotation. The results are even stronger when it comes to terms that were stated as having a rather male connotation: 71% of all stated meanings of leadership connoted as rather being a male attribute were delivered by males. Contrary to that, merely 29% of females stated a word that they would rather connect to a male. Yet, in summary of all the 166 attributes that were stated, the share of female and male connoted meanings is almost equal: with exactly 50% of the words connected as rather having a male connotation, 49% as rather having a female connotation, and 1% without an answer, the commonly assumed stereotypes of leader attributes as naturally having a rather male connotation cannot be verified according to our results.

What can be inferred from this is a first possible and very positive step towards overcoming the lack of women in leader positions: according to the respondents of our questionnaire, the phenomenon of leadership is not clearly being male connoted anymore, but at least an equal share of female as well as male connected meanings can be found. These insights are indeed quite expressive and positively surprising and will have a noticeable effect on the final outcome of this thesis.

3.3. Our Definition of Leadership in the Context of our Thesis

The above outlined results from investigating first and secondary data concerning the meaning of leadership in the context of the thesis at hand delivered extremely help- and insightful findings that will now be put together in order to finalize a suitable definition.

As it’s been outlined and analyzed earlier, the roots of the development of leadership theory date back to the 18th century, where Carlyle’s Great Men Theory clearly stated the heroic and, without any doubt, male dominated era of leaders. Indeed, his insights marked the starting point for a massive amount of researches within the field of leadership over the next centuries up until today. The large amount of researches and publications mainly focused on leadership as a phenomenon itself, but only during the last half century did they consider the dominance of females in this field and started to investigate the role and position of female leaders. As
this, and precisely the gender-related attributes towards leadership being the main focus of this thesis, the role of women and their development in leadership theory is of special interest to us. What the scientific insights from secondary data such as articles and books revealed was, that the major stereotypes of males being naturally connected with leadership still prevail, yet, that a change, even though a very slow one, is noticeable.

However, those results of our questionnaire that aimed at finding a possible definition of leadership in the context of gender revealed interesting insights to point towards another direction: the leadership attributes submitted by the respondents were not naturally being perceived as male, but almost equally perceived as female and male. This insight is a surprising and extremely expressive outcome for us, as it shows that a change is indeed taking place and that the major interest in the topic of leadership and gender actually comes to fruition.

Therefore, it can now be said that in the context of this thesis, namely in search of what are the gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards selected leadership attributes, leadership is a phenomenon that today, cannot be pigeonholed as being male anymore. The findings of secondary data gathered through the questionnaire clearly show a change of notion amongst respondents and reveal, that the stereotype of males as being naturally perceived as leaders is not uniformly true anymore. Moreover, also the numerous feedback mails, messages and other notifications communicated to us show, that there is a major interest in the topic of gender and leadership. Especially the feedback constructively criticizing the fact, that some questions where leadership attributes should be classified as either female or male connoted, left no space for choosing both or neither.

This shows us that leadership is an amazingly multifaceted and diverse phenomenon, which is impossible to narrow down to certain aspects such as the distinct classification of gender. Thus, leadership, for us and in the context of the thesis at hand, is the art of leading others (Daudi, et al. 2015) by effectively using personal values, characteristics, and behaviors in order to bring out the best in followers without regard to gender.
4. Leader Attributes

4.1. The Attributes

An integral part of the questionnaire we designed with the aim of learning more about the gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards selected leadership attributes, are the 11 attributes leaders can fulfill which we asked questionnaire respondents to identify as either rather strengths of female leaders or rather strengths of male leaders. Before venturing into the explanation of how and why we chose the 11 attributes, it should be noted that the characterization of rather strengths of female leaders or strengths of male leaders was the section of our questionnaire, on which we received most feedback. Many respondents expressed that they experienced it as extremely difficult to choose between the options given and would have, had it been offered, selected “strength of neither gender” for most or all of the attributes we had listed.

For us as a research team, this had multiple implications: First of all, we had to deal with the psychological effects that some rather crudely formulated messages from questionnaire respondents had. However, reminding ourselves of the time, efforts and attention we had invested into not only selecting the 11 attributes, but also the amount of time spent discussing how we would formulate the survey questions - not only between the two of us as a research team but also in coordination and with input from our thesis supervisor Professor Daudi - combined with the large amount of encouraging and positive feedback we received during the first week of our questionnaire being online, proofed to us that we had touched upon a current, heavily debated and relevant research issue. Moreover, as it’s been argued for in an earlier part of this thesis, also the feedback criticizing our questionnaire design could be effectively used as it revealed the sensitivity of the topic and pointed towards the insight that certain attributes could simply not be put into a rigid gender frame.

When it comes to exploring why and how we chose the 11 attributes which were part of our research questionnaire, we have to begin with ourselves. As a mixed gender and also mixed nationality research team, with a combined educational and work experience from a variety of countries, we initiated the attribute selection process with a personal discussion of the leaders we had experienced in our lives so far. This discussion was not only an insightful starting point in research terms, but also helped us as a team, who had gotten to know each other rather well over the course of the last year, in critically reflecting on the perceptions we had
and have of leaders as well as contemplating our own perceptions and attitudes on gender, leadership, ourselves and the theoretical frameworks and academic writings we had explored during our time as students.

From the beginning onwards, we agreed that being communicative was one of the attributes we both had experienced to have tremendous potential for positive as well as negative impact in the arena of leadership. Additionally, communication has also been a recurring topic during our academic leadership studies. Last but not least, our belief in the importance of communication is also supported by the writings of Max De Pree (2004), who in his book Leadership is an Art states, that a leader must be a great communicator. Moreover, Burtis and Turman (2010) almost entirely dedicate their research in their book Leadership Communication as Citizenship to the exploration of the role of communication and its importance for leaders.

Defining a vision is something that we as a research team have done since the beginning of our co-authoring process and have found extremely rewarding. Not only does having a vision motivates one to actually sit down and do the work necessary to fulfill said vision, but redefining the vision and adapting it to the changing realities is also challenging at the same time. Carton, Murphy and Clark (2015) describe defining a vision as one of the two most important types of communication which leaders use to foster not only understanding, but ultimately a productive output from employees and followers. Supporting this fact, Miller (2014) describes a lack of vision as one of the most common reasons for enterprise failures.

Motivating team members, again, is one of the attributes we selected and experienced a lot ourselves during the process of authoring this thesis. As Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro and Farh (2011) stated, motivating and demotivating team members does not only cause effects with regard to the performance of individual team members, but additionally, motivation related effects often combine and in turn lead to multiplication or division effects, much like the synergy metaphor “1+1=3” claims. This can be true for both, positive and negative effects.

The attribute being charismatic is, in our perception, one of the most controversial elements of leadership studies, with advocates praising it to the high heavens and opponents condemning it for eternity. For us as a research team, a critical but open-minded approach to charisma in leadership seems to be the healthiest and most realistic approach.
The reasons for this is that we believe, as Conger and Kanungo (1994) described it, being a charismatic leader means that the leader differentiates him- or herself from others in comparable leadership positions through the ability to come up with, and effectively and efficiently communicate an inspiring vision which motivates followers to go beyond the call of duty. At the same time, we as a research team believe that as Ingram (2013) outlined, charisma can be misused and effectively make followers blind.

*Setting goals* is one of the points where the usually differentiated jobs of leaders and managers overlap. The reason for this is that the nature of setting goals consists of the alignment of motivation, task and the desired output (Locke and Latham, 2002, Van Knippenberg and Stam, 2013). Even though it could be argued that setting goals and setting a vision are rather similar, we fully agree with Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) who stated, that whilst visions and goals are similar in at least some aspects such as the orientation towards an end results, one of the most significant differences is that, generally speaking, visions are rarely, if ever, fully achieved. Contrary to that, a set goal is a very specific desired outcome which can in most cases be actually achieved.

The responsibility which a leader has to be *acting as a role model* is again a topic which we, as a research team, have strong personal feelings about. A number of positive as well as negative experiences in this regard have shaped both our thinking. From an academic point of view, we support the idea described by Brown and Treviño (2014), which claims that role models heavily facilitate the acquisition of almost all types of behavior and consequently, can at least potentially play a key role in the shaping of an individual’s future as a leader.

In the globalized, fast-moving, and ever-changing world we are living in at the moment, *being transformational* is often required from a leader for a wide variety of reasons: Whilst we firmly believe that a solid reason for transformation should be given in order for the process to be successful and lead to a sustainable outcome, we are also convinced that being an effective and efficient transformational leader is something that can have a tremendously positive impact on employees and followers. The reason for this is not only the research carried out by Kelloway, Turner, Barling and Loughling (2012), but also our conviction that being a transformational leader means helping employees or followers to either transform themselves or the tasks they are entrusted with, to enable a mutually beneficial, balanced and productive union of employee and task.
The attribute *trusting team members* can be defined as a leader’s willingness to take a risk of damage or failure based on his or her estimate and expectation of a follower’s or employee’s knowledge, competence, integrity, and ability to deal with tasks at hand (Pavlou, et al. 2006). Unfortunately, we as a research team have again had a variety of negative, but also some positive experiences with regards to this attribute. However, we are proponents of what Huemer, van Krogh and Roos (1998) argued, being that teams with a high degree of trust in each other’s work in a more cooperative and more conscientious manner, thus generating more and better results. The same principle applied in reverse is valid for *earning trust from team members*, which we as researchers are convinced is a key thing for effective, efficient, and respected leaders to keep in mind.

The attribute of *being a team player* is one that is in line with the recently increasing pressure to promote collaborative work in professional teams. As Mitchell, Boyle, Parker, Giles, Chiang and Joyce (2015) mention, leader inclusiveness is important when it comes to promoting and fostering the valuing of different and often differing viewpoints of team members. A well-integrated leader who makes use of his followers or employees, who has a variety of diverse backgrounds, has been shown to at least have the potential to overcome barriers and greatly enhance performance. As a research team, we have not only experienced this during our time as students, but also in a variety of professional settings.

As Keller and Foster (2012) explained, the propensity for *risk taking* varies greatly between different leaders, with underlying psychological drivers being the reasons for this. We both have worked as employees and questioned risk related decisions our employers and or leaders have taken, and as a consequence, consider this aspect of leadership worth adequate attention.

The above outlined personal as well as scientific arguments for the attributes used in the questionnaire justify our choice and show the relevance and importance of each attribute. The following section will now outline and further illustrate the findings of our questionnaire concerning these attributes.
4.2. The Ranking

4.2.1. The Most Important Attribute

In order to broaden our knowledge concerning the gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards selected leadership attributes, we asked the respondents to rank the, for them, three most important leader attributes from a choice of 11 attributes. The following screenshot shows the first question and serves as an example of how it was asked:

**Ranking**

Please select the leader attribute which you consider most important. * 

Please choose only one of the following:
- Being communicative
- Defining a vision
- Motivating team members
- Being charismatic
- Setting goals
- Acting as a role model
- Being transformational
- Trusting team members
- Earning trust from team members
- Being a team player
- Risk taking

*Image 3 – Ranking Question One*

As it can be seen in Image 3, respondents were asked to choose the, in their opinion, most important attribute out of the ones listed in the question. The following graph will now reveal the interesting results. It should be noted that each section shows one attribute and their percentage share within the ranking of the most important attribute. Moreover, for matters of convenience, it is easiest to review the graph starting from the first listed attribute in the legend, namely acting as a role model, and the accordingly colored share within the pie chart:
Graph 8 – The most important Attribute

Graph 8 illustrates the percentage of how respondents ranked the attributes by their importance. However, it should not be implied at this point that the lower ranked attributes are the ones that are less important for the respondents of our questionnaire, but it outlines how many people ranked each attribute as the most important. As it can be seen, with a majority of 25%, *defining a vision* is ranked the most important attribute. The result shows that according to our findings, it is indeed important for followers to be lead by someone who provides vision. This seems logical as defining a vision leaves room for the followers to interpret, express themselves and to develop their own strengths. This means that defining a vision is not a rigid but rather open attribute, that does not only provide leaders with the freedom to shape it according to their understanding, but it also provides followers, i.e. the interprets of the vision, with a guideline and support in order to coalesce their understanding (c.f. Section 4.1. The Attributes – *Defining a vision*).

However, in order to put the above presented results in the context of the thesis at hand – gender and leadership– it is obviously very interesting for us to see how the dispersion of gender connotation is spread when it comes to defining a vision. Therefore, we asked people to identify this attribute as rather having a female connotation or rather a male connotation. The following graph outlines the results of this investigation:
As Graph 9 displays, questionnaire respondents identified, next to being ranked the most important attribute, *defining a vision* as being a rather male connoted attribute. However, with a share of 60% male and 40% female votes, the difference is not significantly high. Yet, the result is still expressive and might be interpreted into several directions: First, it may be said that it is still rooted within society that males are rather strategic thinkers, reminiscing about war times or even earlier, when strategic thinking was depending on males in order to plan survival. This is a speculative approach that yet can be connected to earlier findings presented in this thesis: Again coming back to Carlyle’s Great Men Theory, it can be inferred that great leaders from the past necessarily needed to be able define a vision as they were decision makers in situations where the most suitable and thought-through strategy decided over thousands of lives. This is not only true for the leaders Carlyle referred to in the beginning of the 18th century, but also for influential leaders during the First and Second World War. Putting this back into the context of the above displayed results, this seems logical. The share again positively dissents our expectations as it seems like the rooted stereotypes of male leaders slowly cease to be valid.
4.2.2. The Second Most Important Attribute

As it’s been described before, we asked the respondents of our questionnaire to rank the 11 presented leadership attributes according to their importance. The results of the ranking of the second most important attribute can be found in the following graph. Again, the results show the share of each attribute as being ranked the second most important and do not necessarily provide information about the least important attribute:

The attribute that was voted second most important by respondents is *motivating followers*. With a total share of 17%, followed by defining a vision with 16%, as well as earning trust from followers with a total share of 15%, motivating followers does not protrude significantly and should be handled and analyzed accordingly: As it’s been argued for in an earlier section of the thesis at hand, motivating followers does play a crucial role when it comes to effective leadership: the ability to motivate followers can be very beneficial as it increases performance and satisfaction. However, it is interesting that motivating followers is not an attribute that should be viewed by itself, but rather in the context of defining a vision and earning trust from
followers. This connection is valuable for the analysis of the questionnaire findings as it reveals the intertwined nature of the attributes and again serves as an argument for our conscious choice of these: as its been argued by Ilies, Judge and Wagner in their article *Making Sense of Motivational Leadership* (2006), defining a vision positively stimulates motivation as it provides goals which in turn has positive effect on followers because of their guiding, shaping and supporting nature. Moreover, defining a vision also serves as a basis for earning trust from followers as this vision reveals the leader’s faith in what she is doing, which again has positive effect on motivation.

As it can be seen, the dots can again be connected and reveal the diverse but at the same time extremely intertwined nature of leadership. However, for the purpose of this thesis, these findings should now be reviewed in the context of gender. Therefore, the following pie chart will reveal the share of females and males who ranked the attribute of motivating followers as the second most important attribute:

![Motivating Followers](image)

*Graph 11 – Motivating Followers*

Graph 11 shows the percentage share of respondents who ranked *motivating followers* as rather strength of a female or rather as strength of a male leader. As it can be derived from the graph, the proportion of female connotations amounts to a total of 48%, whereas the proportion of males amounts up to 52%. These results again are in conformity with the already outlined findings of the thesis at hand: motivating followers as one of the key
attributes of leadership is not perceived as distinctively being male anymore, but rather balanced in its share of both – female and male.

Digging even deeper into the heart of this attribute and putting it again into the context of history, it is amazing to see that there is indeed a noticeable change in the perception of leaders: As motivating followers is also an attribute that played a significant role during the First and Second World War especially with regard to the third Reich in Germany, where the motivation of followers was one of the key promoters, this attribute was indeed extremely male lined. Therefore, receiving a result of an almost equal share of females and males that are perceived to be connected to the attribute is indeed expressive and a highly valuable insight with regard to the final outcome of the thesis at hand.

As it seems, up to this point of the present thesis, there is an indeed noticeable change in the perception of typical leadership attributes and the perceived gender connotation. This insight is most valuable and interesting and provides a promising outlook for the following results.

4.2.3. The Third Most Important Attribute

After outlining the first and second most important attribute ranked by respondents, the third most important might also reveal interesting and new insights about leadership perceptions and gender. As its been done before, the following pie chart will reveal the percentage share of each attribute within the ranking of the third most important attribute of the 11 listed. In a next step, these findings will be put into the context of gender:
Gender and Leadership – Leader Attributes

As it can be seen in Graph 12, the attribute that was ranked third most important by the respondents of our questionnaire was *motivating followers* with a total share of 18%. This outcome is quite interesting for us as researchers as it was already ranked the second most important attribute in the ranking outlined above. What might be inferred from this is that motivating followers is, next to defining a vision as being ranked the most important attribute with a total amount of 25%, is indeed also one of the most important attributes. This seems logical as these two are inevitably linked with each other: as it’s been said before, defining a vision sets the basis for motivating followers by providing guideline and support. This argumentation can also be further outlined when reviewing the other attributes and their according ranks: With a total amount of 12%, *setting goals* was voted second within the ranking.

Yet, this attribute is strongly connected to defining a vision, as also Ilies, Judge and Wagner state when saying that setting goals is an inevitable part of defining a vision (2006). They even go further and argue that self-efficacy of followers is majorly influenced by these factors, which again, is connected to the level of motivation of followers (Ilies, et al. 2006, p. 12): “In sum, visionary leadership influences followers’ self-efficacy and self-self goals through leader goal-setting.”
What might be interesting now is the distribution of gender connotation with regard to the attribute of setting goals. Hence, how does the percentage share of female and male connotations look like? The following pie chart will provide answers:

![Graph 13 – Setting Goals](image)

With a share of 53%, the attribute of *setting goals* is rather perceived as strength of a male leader. However, similar to the findings presented above, also 47% of the respondents perceive setting goals as a strength of a female. This result is indeed interesting and quite insightful, and again confirms what we have explored before: The strong stereotype that we expected to still prevail in the unconscious part of perceptions of people does not exist anymore. According to the respondents of our questionnaire, also the attribute of setting goals, which constitutes an important and powerful tool of leaders, is not necessarily perceived to be male dominated anymore, but rather counterbalanced between females and males. This result again positively surprises us and further consolidates the impression of leaders as not being perceived as naturally male anymore.

**4.2.4. The Least Important Attribute**

The above outlined and analyzed arguments reveal insightful findings on important leadership attributes as well as the connected perception of gender. However, in order to do proper research, it is also necessary to investigate what is perceived to be not important when it comes to leader attributes and how this is to be seen in the context of the existing findings. In
order to do so, we asked people to choose the one attribute that they perceive as being least important. The following graph outlines the results:

![The Least Important Attribute](image)

The astonishing and very clear result of the ranking of the least important attribute is *being charismatic* with a total share of 27%. Especially in the light of the second least important attribute which is *being transformational* as well as *risk taking*, both with a percentage of 13%, being charismatic protrudes clearly. The reasons for this result can again only be speculative, but according to many studies conducted in the field of toxic leadership, being charismatic can also be one of the most dangerous characteristics of a leader (c.f. Conger & Kanungo 1998, Padilla et al. 2007, Walton 2007). This insight is to be seen in a context, where leadership can have a negative influence. So far, we have only reviewed the phenomenon of leadership in a positive context, where the leader has intentions that serve for the benefit of one and others. However, especially again with regard to the third Reich and the influence of toxic leaders such as Hitler, the consequences of being a charismatic leader can have extremely powerful negative magnitudes. In this context however, it should be regarded that the connection made between certain toxic leader attributes and the third Reich is also highly influenced by our own nationalities, Austrian and German, and the fact that our history...
and the way we are educated puts being charismatic as well as being transformational in a very negative light and provides us with certain bias when it comes to these attributes in the context of leadership.

Therefore, similar backgrounds can also be inferred from the characteristic of *being transformational*. Just as being charismatic, this attribute is extremely powerful with regard to its influence on followers. Again, it should be noted that this approach is only speculative and based on findings from the topic of toxic leadership. The same is certainly true for charismatic and transformational leaders with good intentions: in this case, their power and influence can be of extreme support and positive benefit for an organization, group, or else. In this case, especially in the light of reviewing the attribute *being charismatic* from a toxic leadership point of view, the proportion of gender connotation is highly interesting. Therefore, we also asked as part of our questionnaire, whether the least important attribute of being charismatic has a rather female or rather male connotation. The following graph reveals the findings of this investigation:

![Graph 15 – Being Charismatic](image)

As expected, being charismatic has a striking perception of being male according to the respondents of our questionnaire. With a total percentage of 79%, this attribute is clearly male connotated. This outcome does not come surprisingly, looking back upon the possible reasons for this attribute to be voted the least important. If our assumptions are true, respondents might be, conscious- or unconsciously, still sensory when it comes to charisma in the context of leadership. Moreover, it might also be assumed that females have to provide many more
abilities as a leader than charisma and are therefore not dominantly perceived as charismatic in leadership contexts. This assumption can be connected to the current trends and findings in the mainstream media as well as in academia, as they consistently report, that women still face more difficult circumstances in leadership positions with regard to their need of proving their abilities (c.f. Forbes Magazine 2014, Eagly & Karau 2002, Mattis, et al. 1998).

However, in this context we came to a very surprising turning point: when evaluating the findings of gender connoted preferences amongst the attributes, the above in toxic leadership context mentioned trait of being transformational shows interesting outcomes. Against our expectations, this attribute was voted amongst the least important. Moreover, as we assumed it to be rather seen in the context of toxic leadership, we also expected it to be seen as a rather strength of a male leader. Yet, we were disabused:

As it can be seen in Graph 16, being transformational is perceived as rather a strength of a female leader with a total percentage of 58%. This is an extremely expressive and very interesting outcome, as it dissents our expectations and also does not fully walk in line with what has been so far assumed in a majority of researches: According to our findings, women have the power to be a transformational leader who have substantial influence on its followers, indeed, they are more perceived as being transformational compared to their male counterparts. This result is both informative and valuable for the purpose of our research as it reveals that even though most transformational leaders in the past were indeed male, the
perception of a transformational leader as being male is obsolete. This again constitutes a major insight we gained from the work of this thesis so far and will have a substantial influence on the outcome of this work.

What can be derived so far from the ranking of the 11 leadership attributes is, that leadership and gender is a topic, that is almost impossible to forecast. The extremely insightful and interesting findings both confirmed and also totally dissented our expectations. However, it must again be noted that the heavy amount of feedback we received on our questionnaire does go in accordance with the diverse and surprising results, as many participants argued for a “neither” choice when it came to a gender connotation concerning the listed attributes. This shows us that the very topic of leadership and gender requires a lot of room for personal interpretation and expression and also that leadership cannot be pigeonholed as being male dominated anymore. The many thoughts and thought provoking comments are indeed highly appreciated for the outcome of this thesis and again reveal its beauty of diversity.

Another interesting result stemming from the evaluation of the questionnaire outcomes is the attribute of being a team player. As it can be detected in all the above displayed graphs in the context of the attribute ranking, being a team player does not seem to be crucial to the respondents of our questionnaire: Neither within the ranking of the top three most important attributes nor within the ranking of the least important attribute can being a team player be found within the highest ranks. What this might imply for us as researchers is the following: being a team player as described in an earlier section of this thesis is – according to Mitchell, et al. (2015), a crucial part for successful leaders as it may eases the sometimes differing opinions and viewpoints of team members. Hence, it might be inferred that being a team player is indeed important when it comes to leader effectiveness, however, according to our findings does not play an inevitable role. Yet, this result is very interesting for us as it rather contradicts with what has been inferred from the results of the user submitted leadership attributes, where the fast majority stated empathy as supplement of our chosen attributes.

As empathy incorporates the care and understanding for the needs of others, it is a vital part of succesful team work. However, with the results supplied by the questionnaire, other attributes seem to overrule being a team player. Nonetheless, it will be interesting to see the percentage share of respondents who declared the said attribute as rather having a female or rather having a male connotation:
As the above displayed graph shows, being a team player has a rather clear connotation: 68% of the questionnaire respondents perceive this attribute as being rather female connotated. In the context of this research this outcome does not reveal an unprecedented insight, as being a team player is a commonly assumed female attribute: Referring back to the mentioned example of Geert Hofstede's Masculine versus Feminine Dimension of National Culture (c.f. 3.1.3. Females in Leadership Theory), which assumes that females rather choose cooperation and care for others, it can be seen that being a team player indeed is female connotated.
5. Gender Perspective

5.1. Further Findings

During the research questionnaire design process, we as a research team had a number of meetings with our thesis supervisor, Prof. Dr. Dr. Philippe Daudi, who was also the Director of our academic programme at Linnaeus University in Kalmar. One of the points we discussed the most, was how to manage the scope of our research. By asking questions in a specific way, we aimed to have precise findings which would lend themselves to theoretical analysis and evaluation. At the same time, we wanted to give the questionnaire respondents space to express their personality and their personal view on the topic of gender and leadership. One way we choose in order to accomplish this goal was to ask respondents to share with us what leadership means to them in one word. We felt that by opening the question by asking “what leadership means” to the questionnaire respondents, we were providing room for expression to everyone who took the time to complete our research questionnaire. By limiting the answer to a single word, we were hoping to trigger a reflection process which ideally leads the individual embarking on it to a simplistic, but yet powerful result: a single word which describes what leadership means to the respondent. Before finally deciding to include this question in the questionnaire, we as researchers had a rather long discussion about the merit of challenging respondents who were already investing time by answering our questions, to invest even more time and distil what leadership means to them into a single word.

As many researchers before us, we decided to try our methods on ourselves. By challenging ourselves to come up with a single word that describes what leadership means to us, we not only put ourselves in the shoes of those who would answer our questionnaire, but we also learned a lot about each other. First of all, we learned that we both like to do things properly, taking almost an hour of reflection time before coming up with a single word which describes what leadership means to us. The words we both came up with were “responsibility” and “accountability”. Without going into further detail, this showed to us as researchers that, after much contemplating, we both understood why the other person choose the word he or she did, and we both felt happy to once again see, that we had similar perceptions of what leadership is really about.
When it comes to analyzing the words the questionnaire respondents submitted, the relevant section of this thesis is the right place to look (c.f. 3.2. The Questionnaire Approach). Without looking at the words themselves, this very section of our thesis is aimed at exploring the gender perspective of the question described above. After asking respondents to state a single word, we asked if the word stated had a female connotation or a male connotation. Our aim as researchers was not only to trigger a reflective process in questionnaire respondents, resulting in a single word, but rather to then again connect this reflective process to the core issue of gender in leadership.

As the graph below shows, our findings reveal much information about our questionnaire respondents:

34% of females stated that their one word meaning of leadership had a female connotation whilst 21% of females stated that it had a male connotation. In comparison to this, 31% of males stated that their one word meaning of leadership had a male connotation whilst 14% of males stated that it had a female connotation.

The first interesting deduction which can be drawn from this is that females and males are very similar when it comes to the likeliness of their one word meaning of leadership corresponding to their own gender.
It is possible that this fact points towards a gender-related way of perceiving leadership which makes both - females and males, more likely to see the positive in their own gender rather than the opposing one.

In contrast to this is the likeliness of individuals stating a one word meaning of leadership, which opposes their own gender: 14% of males stated that the word they had stated had a female connotation whilst 21% of females stated that the word they had chosen had a male connotation. With the gender-gap in questionnaire respondents during our research project being “only” 10% (55% female respondents, 45% male respondents) this finding suggests that there are two possibilities when it comes to females and their perception of leadership, based upon their one word meaning of leadership and its gender connotation:

One possibility might be that females are simply more willing to admit that their one word meaning of leadership has a connotation which is in contrast to their own gender when compared to their male counterparts. The other possibility is, that females perceive leadership in such a way, that they instinctively gravitate towards a one word meaning which has a male connotation. In other words this would imply; females perceive leadership in a more male dominated way than males perceive it in a female dominated way.

For us as researchers, evaluating this part of our research findings was extremely interesting and led to a number of discussions and reflections: We believe that it is more likely that females perceive leadership in a much more male dominated way than vice-versa. It is our opinion that the mass media as well as the underlying gender bias in language, as outlined in earlier parts of this thesis (c.f. 2.1.1. Gender bias in language), are two of the main driving factors for this reality. From our point of view, this underlines the importance of initiatives that aim at promoting gender neutral language as well as those who pro-actively encourage females to “break the mould” and pursue their dreams rather than fulfilling the expectation society might confront them with.

However, it should be said that we are also firm believers that the process of changing the use of language as well as the way media portrays females and males alike, is one that cannot happen overnight, but needs diligent attention and a lot of work to realize. However, we are convinced that not only individuals, e.g. females being denied access to certain positions, but rather society as a whole would benefit from a drastic change in this area. The reason for this is that restricting access to certain professions or levels of management can have consequences we cannot even foresee today.
The following graph depicts questionnaire respondents’ perception on which gender makes the better leader. The yielded result was surprising for us as researcher: Since we know from writing about gender-bias in language, that gender related issues are sometimes perceived as more of an inhibition by women than by men, we thought that the question of which gender makes the better lead would be dominated by the gender which had the highest amount of respondents. Our reasons for believing so is that those affected more by the issue at hand, in this case gender and leadership, would be more willing to invest time and energy in expressing their opinions and challenging prevalent ideas.

With 55% of those individuals who filled out our questionnaire being female, this would mean that the perception that females make the better leaders is the one we as a research team would have expected to dominate. However, as the graph above reveals, 49% of those who answered our questionnaire think that men are the better leaders. And 51% believe that females are.

For us as researchers, this finding means a multitude of things. First of all, our presumption, or the belief we held in advance of carrying out our research, as proven to be incorrect. It should be said that this experience was one of the most satisfactory for us during this entire research process. Since the beginning of our times as students, we have been lucky enough to have teachers who reminded us of the importance of constantly challenging our perceptions and being open to new ideas. By finding out that, even after having studied leadership for a considerable time, our ideas are still be formed, in this case through research we ourselves have carried out, was an extremely re-assuring one.
For us it means that by having adapted to a way of critically thinking about issues and trying to reflect on them as deeply as we can, we are ready for a life of everlasting learning, without the fear of failure by believing in so called facts, which might change over time. We have truly accepted the idea that knowledge and insight is continuously changing and instead of being afraid of said change, we have come to welcome it as a challenge that enables us to continuously grow as scholars and humans in general.

As mentioned above, 45% of those who answered our questions were males. Since we were intrigued by having one of our presumptions or predications for the outcome of our research disproved, we were excited to evaluate the data more deeply. We did this by finding out in what balance the genders were when it came to believing that their own, or the opposing gender, was the better leader. The two graphs below depict exactly this:

Graph 20 - Gender distribution of questionnaire respondents who think females make the better leaders

Graph 20 shows that 71% of those who stated they believe females make the better leaders, are actually females themselves, which leaves 29% of males who believe that females make the better leaders. However, the following graph will now reveal the gender distribution of respondents who believe that males make the better leaders:
As the above displayed graph shows, 57% of those who stated they believe males make the better leaders, are actually males themselves, leaving 43% of females who believe that males make the better leaders. Again, these findings are extremely interesting and challenged us as researchers and students of leadership on how to evaluate them and earn most value for the thesis at hand. One explanation for the data represented in Graphs 20 and 21 could be, that the 14% difference in belief that the own respective gender makes the better leader is almost entirely caused by the 10% lead females have in replying to our questionnaire compared to men. However, we as researcher do not believe that this is the case. We are more convinced by the idea that the same principle applies as is described in the section on gender bias in language. Our view is that females are more aware of the gender inequality in leadership and by expressing their opinions in our questionnaire, found a way of voicing their discomfort with the current situation and are therefore more likely to be of the opinion that their own gender makes the better leader.

Another interesting deduction that can be drawn from the two stated graphs is, that with 43% of females expressing that they think males make the better leaders, only 29% of males claim they believe females make the better leaders. Hence, females perceive leadership in a much more male dominated way than the other way around. This idea was already mentioned in our section on the relationship between respondents’ gender and the gender of the one word they stated represented the meaning of leadership (c.f. 3.2. The Questionnaire Approach, Graph 6 -
Top 6 submitted leadership meanings and the respondents’ gender. For us as researchers, this explanation which applies to a multiple of our research findings seems to be logical: With the ever-growing roles which the mass media plays in our daily lives, we believe that stereotypical depictions of men, women, and people of public interest as well individuals in leadership positions, cements this perception. We are of the opinion that there is still a circle of insecurity and self-doubt when it comes to the ability to lead in females, which is fuelled by mass media and the gender bias language. Even though many other results we gained from our questionnaire reveal that stereotypes are not as strongly perceive anymore, it cannot be inferred that they are completely vanished. More likely, as it’s been said before, the development of females in leader positions is indeed moving towards a more equal share with their male counterparts.

We are of the opinion that pushing this development has to start with the media and gender bias in language, as expecting women to change their way of perceiving is simply impossible if there is something, such as depictions of men, women, and people of public interest as well individuals in leadership positions, which can be perceived in a negative way by females. We also believe that, since humans are creatures of habit, it will take considerable time until changes made will lead to measurable results. It should however also be stated that we are firmly convinced that not only businesses and other organisations would benefit from a more gender balanced view on leadership, but overall happiness in the population would increase.

Coming back to the process of lifelong learning, we as researchers felt the need to look even one level deeper at the data we had collected, and correlate respondents’ age and their opinion on who makes the better leader:

**Graph 22 - Questionnaire respondents’ age and their opinion on who makes the better leader**
As Graph 22 shows, there is always a gap in-between which believes makes the better leaders. The confidence that males make the better leaders is the highest in the age group spanning 18-24. The value of 67% is the second highest in the entire graph, only being surpassed by the belief that females make the better leaders, which is shared by 100% of +64 year olds. This extreme outcome of 100% can partially be attributed to the rather small number of questionnaire respondents in the corresponding age group.

What is especially interesting in the data we have recorded is that the opinions of 35-44 year olds and those of 18-24 year olds are almost exactly the opposites of each other. Once again, we looked deeper into the data we have collected to find out, that 26% of all questionnaire respondents are in the age group 18-24 and 15% in the age group 35-44. We as researchers believe, that with both percentage parts of these two age groups being significant and almost in a 1:2 relationship, this data is reliable and a fair representation of the beliefs in said age groups. Up until today, we have both only lived through or experienced the lower of the two age groups, and can therefore not offer any personal insight into how ones perceptions of gender and leadership might be influenced between the age of 35 and 44. However, it can certainly be said that for many people the years between age 35 and 44 are rather important in terms of career progress, and could therefore be very important when it comes to revising and expanding once knowledge and perception of reality. With the years between 18 and 24 being often characterized by physical and hormonal developments, this might be a potential explanation for the tendency of this age group to perceive males as the better leaders. This view could be based on males being perceived as the stronger genders, with strength and dominance being perceived as vital elements of leadership in the years of young adults growing older and more mature.

All in all, the data displayed in graph 22 revealed numerous valuable insights and led to many inspiring discussions. It was also very interesting to see that, apart from the age group 18-24, females are perceived as the better leaders by a 4% to 100% margin, by all age groups. This suggests that there might not be a female disadvantage when it comes to perception of women’s ability to lead.
Another idea which we came up with during the research questionnaire design process was to not only ask which gender questionnaire respondents thought made the better leaders, but also to question which gender they would prefer to be led by themselves. The idea to include this particular question and draw deductions from it was based on our belief that one might be convinced that an idea is true or good, but still not wanting said idea to influence one’s own life.

As Graph 23 indicates, 55% of questionnaire respondents would rather be led by a female and 45% would prefer to be led by a male. Extremely interesting for us as researchers, these percentage numbers are identical with those which represent the gender spread of questionnaire respondents (c.f. p. 35, Graph 3 – Questionnaire respondents’ gender distribution). Consequently, the question of which gender would rather be led by which begged to be asked. However, before providing an answer to this question, we will look at respondent age groups and which gender they would rather be led by.
Once again, the data we collected provided us with lots of insights and new ways of understanding leadership and gender. Across all age groups, respondents stated that they would prefer to be led by females. With the gap between gender preferences ranging from 6% to 100%, the picture is clear. A majority of those who answered our questionnaire, 55% of them being females and 45% being males, prefer to be led by a woman. Once again, the result is most clear in the 64+ age group, with the small number of respondents in said age group offering at least one potential explanation for the clarity of the result.

In total, the data depicted in Graph 24 correlates with the data in Graph 22, which depicts questionnaire respondents’ age and their opinion on who makes the better leader. The most interesting difference can be observed in the 18-24 years age group. With 60% of the relevant questionnaire respondents claiming they would rather be led by a female, whilst only 33% of 18 to 24 year olds stating that they believe females make the better leaders. Again, a number of possible explanations for this should be outlined.

First of all, we asked who questionnaire respondents would rather be led by, and not which gender their preferred leaders in the past have had. For us as researchers this means that, with the majority of leadership positions being occupied by males, the questionnaire respondents aged 18 to 24 have had a number of bad experiences with male leaders, and as a consequence expressed that they would rather be led by a female. Another possible explanation is that with the role of gender bias in language as well as media outlets, the idea that males make the
better leaders is heavily cemented in this age group. Even including the idea that respondents aged 18 to 24 have had a number of bad experiences with male leaders and only as a direct consequence expressed that they would rather be led by a female, still subscribe to the idea that men are the better leaders. However, when we move from respondent age to respondent gender in the light of which gender they would rather be led by, the picture gets a bit clearer and more conclusive:

As Graph 25 shows, 67% of questionnaire respondents who stated that they would rather be led by a female, were female themselves, which leaves us with only 33% of male questionnaire respondents claiming that they would rather be led by a female than a male.
When we move on to the other view, examining the gender of questionnaire respondents who stated that they would rather be led by a male, we see that this preference was expressed by 54% males and 46% females, as shown in Graph 8.

This leads to the conclusion that females in general place a bit more importance on being led by their own gender when compared to males. Once again, a potential explanation could be the higher sensitivity to gender-related issues in the leadership arena which we as researchers believe females have compared to their male counterparts.

In summary it can be seen from the above outlined, analyzed and evaluated results, that the respondents of our questionnaire provided us with interesting and very insightful findings about gender-related perceptions of leadership. The image of stereotypical attributes not perceived as strongly connected to certain genders anymore consolidates, however, in some form or another are still to be found. Yet, what caught our attention and seems to run like a golden threat through the evaluation of our questionnaire results is, that women tend to be more aware of gender-related stereotypes and are therefore naturally more keen on pushing the abolishment of this development.

5.2. User Submitted Leadership Attributes

As mentioned in earlier parts of this thesis, one of the key topics we did our best to constantly keep in our mind during the questionnaire design and implementation processes was, to provide respondents a solid framework in which to answer our questions, whilst at the same time allowing them sufficient space for personal expression. The reason for this is of course that the knowledge, experiences and opinions of all questionnaire respondents is what we are really trying to explore and, in combination with established scientific findings, derive new insights and ideas from. One question in our questionnaire, as seen below in Image 4, offered questionnaire respondents the opportunity to note down a maximum of four leadership attributes they could think of, as well as whether they considered the said attributes as rather male strengths or rather female strengths.
All in all, 74 questionnaire respondents used the opportunity to share with us further leadership attributes they considered important. 209 entries were made all in all. For us as a research team, it was rather difficult to estimate how many responses we should expect, but once again, the quality of the responses was what we agreed would be more important than the frequency. Out of the 74 questionnaire respondents who shared further leadership attributes, 42 were female and 32 were male. As a research team we feel rather content with this number of respondents engaging with us on a deeper level. Additionally to this, we were quite happy to see that both gender participated to similar extents.

When analyzing the answers respondents had provided, a rather peculiar trend emerged: The vast majority of those respondents who did share further leadership attributes with us, stated either two words in total - one identified as rather a strength of a female and one identified as rather a strength of a male - or four words in total - two identified as rather a strength of a female and again two identified as rather a strength. In contrast to this, the majority of the respondents who did not follow this “50-50” trend leaned more towards stating leadership attributes which they considered to be rather strengths of female leaders.

In our interpretation as a research team, this underlines some of the current findings of research on the topic of gender biased language and leadership. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, gender biased language is a topic which in itself is perceived in different ways by females and males, with females being much more aware and proactive about the issue, for example when it comes to the use of gender neutral language. In contrast to this, men often do not see the issue of gender biased language and therefore see no need to use gender neutral language to counteract it.
Indeed, keeping in mind that 42 females and 32 males shared further leadership attributes and female attributes dominated, this shows that not only are women more likely to voice their opinion when it comes to this issue, but also that more female attributes were listed. Most likely, this reflects the trend that women are more prone to being aware of gender biased language and at the same time, having a higher willingness to take counter-actions. This assumption is supported by the trend which we found in the user submitted leadership attributes, with either a balanced selection of attributes being submitted by the respondents, or the side of “rather female strengths” dominating the total amount of attributes submitted.

All in all, 209 words were submitted by respondents, with 114 words being identified as rather strengths of female leaders and 95 words being identified as rather strengths of male leaders. Taking all submissions into consideration, the questionnaire respondents shared 159 different leadership attributes with us. This result once again, proves us as a research team, that a universally accepted and generally applicable definition of leadership is almost impossible to formulate and that our personally elaborated and gender-related leadership definition suits the very personal nature of the topic well.

The word cloud as displayed below depicts all leadership attributes questionnaire respondents shared with us, where the size of each word reflecting the frequency with which it was mentioned. We choose this graphical way of representing the user submitted elements of our questionnaire for two reasons: first of all, displaying all words at the same time is something we felt necessary to show our questionnaire respondents who, by sharing leadership attributes they considered important, took considerable time to fill out the questionnaire. At the same time, this also provided us as researchers insights that many anonymous on-line questionnaires usually cannot supply. By enabling our respondents to freely contribute within the limitation of space our questionnaire offered, we felt that we provided a chance to the respondents to really transmit their feelings about the topic. In addition to this, the graphical representation below, as mentioned before, informs viewers about the frequency with which each word was mentioned thanks to the different font sizes, with bigger words being mentioned more frequently and the smallest words only being mentioned by one questionnaire respondent.
During the data evaluation process, we as a research team spent several hours discussing the word cloud of questionnaire respondent submitted leadership attributes. This task was extremely fascinating and insightful for us, as it provided a real glimpse into the way those who answered our questionnaire view the topic of gender and leadership. In many cases, our own thought went in accordance with the leadership attributes questionnaire respondents submitted, however, at the same time others surprised and challenged us to take new perspectives and thinking differently about the topic of gender and leadership. It should be said that, as it can be seen in the above displayed question where respondents were asked to list leadership attributes, we did not clarify whether the attributes should be of a positive or of a negative nature. By doing so on purpose, we broadened the scale on which respondents could communicate with us, whilst at the same time allowing much more room for personal interpretation on our part as researchers.
One research goal we had in mind from the beginning of our thesis writing process was to try and find any similarity or dissonance between the user submitted leadership attributes and the attributes we had identified as key through the study of academic materials and our personal experiences with leadership. First off, the process of comparing these two different sources of knowledge and interpretation will not only allow us to learn new things about our beliefs, perspectives and the knowledge we have studied, but at the same time will allow us to reflect deeper on the perceptions of leadership attributes with regards to gender.

When now analyzing the top three user submitted leadership attributes, an interesting pattern emerges: Number one on the list is empathy, with a total amount of 11 mentions. We as a research team believe that the term empathetic, which was mentioned 3 times, can be regarded synonymously along with empathy and therefore the scores should be combined. Moreover, we decided that the same is true for the term compassion, which was also mentioned 5 times. This provides the most frequently mentioned leadership attribute with a total of 19 mentions.

In second place, decisive was mentioned a total of 4 times. In our perception, no other words similar to decisive were stated and therefore this total count remains at 4. However, directive was also mentioned a total of 4 times. Once again, in our perception of the user submitted leadership attributes, no other words similar to directive are mentioned and therefore the total count remains at 4 as well.

In order to put these results in the context of the thesis at hand and analyze them accordingly, this first investigation of the user submitted elements in our leadership and gender questionnaire leads us to some interesting conclusions: To begin, it is interesting for us as researcher to see such a large gap between the number one most frequently mentioned leadership attribute and those in position two (and three). Admittedly, we as researchers have taken the liberty of combining several user submitted leadership attributes into one, thus preparing for said attribute an easy path to the top of the list.

Nonetheless, this decision was not made recklessly but rather after subjecting the entirety of user submitted leadership attributes to a substantial amount of analysis, contemplation and study. We also dedicated several hours to studying the words of empathy, empathetic and compassion, leading us to the conclusion that within the realm of leadership and gender study, the differences between the three words are miniscule and can most likely be attributed to the
variety in age, geographical location, native language and other factors influencing how our questionnaire respondents communicate.

For us as a research team, one leadership attribute that came across several times during our time as students of the subject as well as during our times of personal experiences in the field of leadership as employees, seemed to have an exceedingly strong connection to the user submitted attribute of empathy: Trusting followers. We are of the personal opinion that trusting followers is, if not one the most integral, one of the crucial leadership attributes required for establishing a beneficial and well-balanced leader-follower or leader-employee relationship. We have both had our share of experiences were a lack of trust in us as followers lead to a high degree of dissatisfaction, resentment and even anger in the workplace.

When we look at how our questionnaire respondents felt about trusting followers and gender, the graph below shows a rather clear pictures: 77% percent of respondents stated that they feel trusting followers is rather a strength of females leaders:

![Graph 27 – Trusting Followers](image)

Most interestingly enough, this perception our questionnaire respondents shared with us is in line in with how the ones who submitted empathy, empathetic and sympathetic as further leadership attributes classified them: 18 times the words were listed as “rather a female strength” and only once as “rather a male strength”.

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For us as researchers, this implies several things: First of all, it is very rewarding to see the kind of consistency in not only our perceptions of the connection of trusting followers and empathy when it comes to gender, but apparently the questionnaire respondents felt similarly about the two leadership attributes, with similar gender connotation being revealed for both. Additionally to this, as mentioned above, we both have had very strong experiences with leaders trusting their followers and the negative impact a lack of trust can have. Having empathy in the number one spot of user submitted leadership attributes confirms to us as researcher the relevance of this attribute which we have felt so clearly ourselves.

Since we are looking at the trust leader give to their followers or employees, it only seems natural to turn the sides around and look at the question we asked with regards to leaders earning trust from their followers. Again we as a research team have had some personal experiences with this topic, fortunately more positive ones than with leaders trusting followers.

As the graph shows, questionnaire respondents have a similar perception of earning trust from followers and trusting followers. Again, the overwhelming majority of respondents identified earning trust from followers as a skill which a female leader is more likely to possess compared to a male leader.

As a conclusion to all the points listed above, we firmly believe that a recommendation can be made to further inquire in the topic of leadership and trust as one of the key elements in
making leadership more gender-equal and sustainable in the future. Furthermore, the results again reveal the unexpected dominance of female strength for certain attributes that over history of leadership research were rather male perceived. The findings do give reason to further consolidate the impression that leader attributes - as the ones stated in the questionnaire as well as the additional ones stated by respondents – are not necessarily perceived as being male anymore and therefore show even clearer that the share of female and male leaders needs to come to a more even equilibrium.

5.3. The Gender Gap

One of the reasons why we choose to do research on the topic of gender and leadership is that both topics in their own right are often associated with stereotypes. When it comes to gender, that stereotype might be that women love to talk but are not able to park a car properly. When it comes to leadership the stereotype might be that men always want to be the boss and like giving direct orders to others whilst not being able to listen effectively and truly understand the needs of others. Whilst stereotypes might even be based on what is at least a partial truth, we as researchers are of the opinion that stereotypes should be avoided completely if possible and humans, no matter if female or male, in whichever setting, should be judged by their actions and behaviors rather than by what we expect them to do.

For us, exploring an area of knowledge which encompasses, at least in part, such strongly established opinions or beliefs was fascinating in a multitude of ways. First off, it was a true challenge for us as researchers to try to be aware of the stereotypes we might hold ourselves and try our best to not let this limitation influence our question and questionnaire design process. At the same time, once we had completed our questionnaire, we did have a discussion and shared our opinions on what we thought the outcome might look at. Therefore, being a mixed gender research team indeed led to some extremely interesting insights for both of us.

When it comes to our research findings, we were positively surprised to find that most stereotypes we have observed or even been subjected to during our time as employees, students of leadership and human beings in general, were contradicted. It was however interesting to see that some of the points we covered during our personal discussion about the questionnaire, were indeed confirmed by our research findings.
The graph below details questionnaire respondents’ perceptions of the leadership attribute of *being communicative* and whether the respondents consider this to be rather a strength of a female leader or rather a strength of a male leader:

As the graph shows, the vast majority of 91% of questionnaire respondents perceive being communicative as a strength female leaders have with a much higher degree of likeliness compared to their male counterparts. At this point, one should be reminded that 45% of questionnaire respondents were male and 55% of respondents were female. Since this is a quite balanced gender-spread amongst respondents, it can be deducted that the vast majority of males and females both believe that being communicative is a leadership skill, women are more likely to possess in comparison to men. As mentioned in the paragraph above, this was one point that we as a research team discussed and found ourselves agreeing upon before the evaluation of our research findings. In addition to this, the question of effectiveness of communication is not answered by exploring the likeliness of an individual to be communicative, as we did with our questionnaire. Nonetheless, this result was one that made us as researcher not only realize that at least part of our perception of gender and leadership is shared by those who answered our questionnaire, but also that apparently some opinions on gender and leadership are very strong, as is the case with a 91% majority.

In addition to this, this result shows us that at least some perceptions of gender and leadership are shared by males and females alike. This is interesting in a variety of ways and points...
towards the possibility of a, at least, partially shared perception of leadership and gender issues being shared by men and women.

The following graph also depicts a very one sided or clear research finding. Again, with 45% males and 55% females responding to our questionnaire, a perception of a leadership attribute shared by the majority of men and women is uncovered:

As the graph shows, 94% of questionnaire respondents stated that taking risks is rather a strength of a male leader. Interestingly enough, we as a research team had spent considerable time debating the leadership attribute of risk taking before deciding to include it in our questionnaire. From the beginning onwards, we had different perceptions of taking risks in a leadership setting and how risks could be a positive but also a negative endeavor. Through discussions and sharing of experiences we did managed to find an agreeable basis of including taking risks in our research questionnaire. Up until this point however, we are still discussing what the meaning of risk taking as a strength is, and whether taking risks can ever be a strength of an individual or - if it is - dictated by circumstances and the ever inevitable risk of loss or failure, a weakness which individuals can control and guide depending on their personality and surroundings.

After examining the gap between genders within the framework of data we collected through our research questionnaire, we decided to check if there were any leadership attributes which were almost perfectly balanced between genders. We felt that since we dedicated time to attributes which were leaning heavily towards one gender, it would only be fair to point out any gender-balanced or gender-neutral attitudes towards leadership attributes.
As Graph 31 shows, questionnaire respondent’s perception of acting as a role model in a leadership context is, that females and males do it well to a very high degree. 52% of respondents stated that they feel acting as a role model is a strength of male leaders while 48% stated the considered acting as a role model to be a strength of a female leader. In our perception and experience as scholars and employees, this attribute is a very key element in being an efficient and effective leader. We both feel that if the person who is leading an effort, definitely needs to show that she or he is her- or himself more than capable of acting in a way which inspires followers or employees to follow suit. For us as a researchers, taking into consideration the 55% female and 45% male spread of our overall questionnaire respondents, the findings depicted in graph 31 indicate that both genders have a high regard for the leadership attribute or behavior of acting as a role model. We believe that the majorities of respondents in both genders felt the importance of acting as role model and therefore attributed it to their own gender. It is our opinion that this was not only done because of the importance which both genders place on this attribute, but also on the fact that females and males alike, prefer to see individuals of their own respective gender as a role model. The reason for this is that in a person which is similar to oneself, it is easy to see similarities and also a path which one can walk on to achieve success in the future.

All in all, it was a very interesting experience for us as researcher to be dealing with a variety of research findings with some, as the two mentioned on the previous pages, being very clear and in-line with what we as researchers consider main-stream perceptions. On the other hand, having less “one-sided” findings proves to be a different challenge when it comes to drawing
conclusions from said research findings. Again, it should be said that we tried our best to not let the stereotypes and prejudice we carry with ourselves as part of our frames of references influence the process of designing our questionnaire and evaluating our findings. How successful we were remains to be judged by those who take the time to read this thesis.
6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary

As the many arguments, insights, thoughts, descriptions, and ideas above reveal, gender and leadership is an extremely interesting, multifaceted, and ever changing topic. As it can be seen throughout the thesis at hand, many unexpected insights were gained, especially during the evaluation of the data collected through our on-line questionnaire, making this research process exciting and a true experience of expansion of knowledge. Not only the gathering of secondary academic data truly transformed us into experts of the field of leadership and gender, but especially the questionnaire with all its insightful results and the large amount of feedback we received motivated us enormously and proved the relevance and high degree of public interest in the topic of leadership and gender.

In order to draw a final conclusion of the thesis at hand and present the ultimate outcome of this research project, it seems reasonable to start by summarizing the main findings we gained throughout the process: starting with our personal as well as the public relevance of the topic, the reasons and intentions for this project are abundantly clear - the topic of gender and leadership is currently receiving a large amount of attention in the mass media as well as in academia and research. Moreover, it is also extremely relevant for us as a mixed gender researcher team, starting our professional careers in the very near future. The reasons for this is that we ourselves will soon be dealing with leaders in the context of gender – whether as leaders ourselves or in the role of followers – the findings of this work are relevant and of high value for us personally as well as for any and all readers of this thesis with interest in the given field.

For the purpose of clarifying the phenomenon of leadership for us as well as for the audience of our research, a suitable definition in the context of gender studies was required. Therefore, it was necessary to review the history of leadership theory and screen it in the context of the representation of females. The interesting outcome of this process was that women were not noticeably present during almost one century of leadership research. However, during the late 1960s, when first researchers exposed the potential of females in leader positions, they already explored the need for more women in boardrooms and management positions of organizations. In order to find a possible answer to the question why an insight gained more than 40 years ago is still a very popular issue today, we explored the field of gender-related
perceptions and stereotypes of leadership. Yet, as this is a very wide field which requires further refinement, we put the major focus on 11 carefully and consciously selected leadership attributes. The selection process was based on our previous knowledge of leadership and gender. A deeper dimension was added to the selection criterion through discussions with our thesis supervisor as well as the review of a wide variety of academic literature and current research projects. During the course of co-authoring our thesis, we conducted an on-line survey, asking professionals, lecturers, authors and other people interested in the field of gender and leadership about their perceptions of the eleven selected leadership attributes as well as leadership and gender in general.

6.2. The Final Outcome of this Thesis

The results of the above described questionnaire were extremely insightful and revealed both – surprising as well as anticipated outcomes. Firstly, we elaborated a definition of leadership in the context of the thesis at hand in order to clarify what it constitutes for the purpose of this research. Academic materials as well as the results of our questionnaire where used in order to come to the conclusion that leadership is indeed an extremely multifaceted and diverse phenomenon which should not and cannot be narrowed down to a certain gender. In this context, especially the first interrogation of our questionnaire, namely to state the meaning of leadership in one word, served us as the, in semiotics utilized signifier. Moreover, as described in an earlier section of this thesis (cf. 3.2. - The Questionnaire Approach, p. 40), the experiences, impressions, and beliefs respondents associated with leadership and bundled into one word are the signified. Hence, with the concept of semiotics, a definition of leadership in the context of the thesis at hand could be elaborated.

The further results of our questionnaire pointed towards the idea that there are many attributes which we as researchers, in accordance with academic literature, anticipated to be seen as rather strength of male leaders, yet, that were, amongst our questionnaire respondents, being perceived almost equally as strength of males and females alike. Almost equally perceived as strength of female and male leaders was motivating followers with a share of 48% female versus 52% male. Similar results showed setting goals with 53% of respondents perceiving it as male connoted and 47% as female connoted. Also the attribute of defining a vision revealed a slightly stronger share of being perceived as a male strength (60% versus 40% female perceived), however, all in all, we do infer from the given results that there is a development
of females to be perceived as having leader attributes that used to be strongly connected to males in the past.

This insight is further reinforced by the result of the ranking of the 11 leader attributes, were the above stated defining a vision was ranked the most important attribute with a total share of 25% followed by motivating followers with a share of 16%. These results show that the following conclusion is true: the two most important ranked attributes show a rather equal share of being perceived as male and female connoted. On top of that, the attribute which was ranked in 3rd place in the ranking of the most important attribute was earning trust from followers, which was perceived with an extremely clear majority of 70% as being a strength of a female leader. This extremely clear perception towards the female gender might be attributed to former economic incidents such as the Enron scandal in October 2001, where numerous of the firm’s executives committed accounting fraud causing one of the world’s largest bankruptcies (BBC News 2002). Another event of similar magnitude was the BP Oil Spill in April 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico where the explosion and following sinking of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig caused tremendous damages in the surrounding wet life and marina. After major investigations for the cause of this horrifying accident, it is assumed that numerous decisions for cutting costs by the BP (British Petroleum) executives and the according security and maintenance failures are the major cause for this tragic incident (The Guardian 2014). These are only two of numerous incidents caused by failures in business decisions. However, what is very interesting here is that there is no reference to females involved in the mentioned business incidents, or as a matter of fact the vast majority of major business scandals we as researchers have come across, at all. Therefore, it might be inferred that the attribute of earning trust from followers and the respective 70% of respondents who believe that females would rather earn that trust than their male counterparts is to some extend connected to the many business incidents from the past. Where it might have been expected that males in leader positions do empower more trustworthiness than females, our questionnaire and the corresponding findings show different.

As it can be seen, typical leader attributes which we as researchers anticipated to be perceived by the majority of respondents as rather strength of male leaders were proved to be wrong. This constitutes a positive outcome of our investigation, as it reveals that the many actions taken either by governments or other institutions promoting the share of females in leadership indeed come to fruition. Yet, it should also not be dismissed that our research shows that females are indeed much more aware of gender-related stereotypes and the according use in
organizational contexts. As it’s been argued for, we believe that females do perceive leadership in a much more male dominated way than males perceive it in a female way.

In conclusion it can be said that our research and the many findings we explored, reveal that there are still deeply rooted stereotypes which point out leader attributes as naturally male perceived. However, there is a clear and noticeable change in perceptions towards leadership attributes which we as a research team believe needs to be further promoted and pushed in the future. Therefore, our analysis of gender-related perceptions of and attitudes towards selected leadership attributes can be completed with the justified outcome that females and males indeed do perceive leader attributes in a different way, especially against the backdrop of females being much more aware of gender biased language and inequality in leader positions, yet, the road to a more equal perception of females and males when it comes to leadership is steadily being paved. This positive outlook of a more equal perception will in the future hopefully lead to a more balanced share of females and males in leader positions in whatever context that requires effective leadership.

6.3. Future Outlook

The results and above described outcome of this research are promising indicators towards a more equalized share of women and men in leader positions. For us as investigators, the road to this was marked by many unexpected but extremely interesting and astute turning points, revealing numerous insights which truly transformed us into experts of the given field and enabled us to greatly expand our personal horizons. During the course of this thesis, it has been outlined that defining a vision was ranked the most important leadership attribute by the respondents of our questionnaire. Most interestingly enough, the dots can now be connected as defining a vision and elaborating this vision describes exactly the process that occurred during the production of this very research: from the beginning, we had the vision of exploring gender-related perceptions of certain leadership attributes in order to draw conclusions on how strong these perceptions are still perceived and what the implications from these results are for the development of females in leadership.

As it can be seen, the implications and future outlook for females in leadership are quite promising according to the findings of our questionnaire. As the respondents of the said questionnaire are persons that are somehow involved in the field of leadership - the majority in an academic context, these results can naturally not be seen in the context of the general
public and throughout all educational groups. Nevertheless, the results are still meaningful as people that are involved in leadership, just as the questionnaire respondents, are naturally the ones majorly involved in the promotion of new leaders especially in a business context.

Therefore, it can be said that the topic of gender and leadership will certainly be relevant in the future especially when regarded in the context of the given research and the positive development revealed through the results of the questionnaire.
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1. Intro Questionnaire

The following text contemplates the message and information used for the post of our questionnaire in professional social networks such as LinkedIn and the German equivalent Xing. We made use of existing professional groups of Leadership and/or Gender related topics which aim at exchanging information and latest news or innovations on the issue. The subsequent post was created in English as well as in German:

**English version:**

“Dear everyone,

We are a team of two master students of the Leadership and Management Programme at Linnaeus University in Kalmar, Sweden. As part of our thesis we, Valerie Brockmann and Andreas Pfleger, are investigating gender related perceptions of and attitudes towards Leadership. We have designed a questionnaire (see below) and would be very thankful for your participation. Please don’t hesitate to contact us here on LinkedIn (Xing etc.) or at av.masterthesis@gmail.com if you have any questions.

This is the link to our questionnaire:

Many thanks in advance,
Valerie & Andreas”

**German Version:**

„Liebe Forumsmitglieder,


Hier der Link zu unserer Umfrage:

Vielen Dank für Ihre Unterstützung,
Valerie Brockmann & Andreas Pfleger“
## 2. Questionnaire Postings

Moreover, in order to keep track and give structure to our working process, we created a list enumerating in detail where and when the questionnaire was posted as well as the number of participants within the according groups on LinkedIn/Xing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reposts</th>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>Center for Creative Leadership</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>Exeter Leadership in Action circle</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>Leadership for Lawyers</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>Institute of Leadership &amp; Management</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>Leadership Think Tank</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>Linked 2 Leadership</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>Nonprofit Leadership Think Tank</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Smart Leaders - Leadership Education and Development for Leaders Executives and Directors</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transformational Leadership: Front Runners in Organizations</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>Wholehearted Leadership</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women in Leadership</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership and Management in International Context (LNU)</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Netzwerk Studierende bei der DATEV</td>
<td>Xing</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Forum</td>
<td>Xing</td>
<td>6.683</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>Global Leadership Symposium</td>
<td>Xing</td>
<td>823</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>Xing</td>
<td>Beyond Leadership</td>
<td>479</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.03.2015</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Gender Studies Network</td>
<td>4393</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.03.2015</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>ALIA Institute</td>
<td>268</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4833</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.03.2015</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>ThinkYoung Entrepreneurship School Alumni</td>
<td>271</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.03.2015</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Nonprofit Leadership Center of Tampa Bay</td>
<td>818</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>YBB 2015</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 329,694

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Status after</th>
<th>Full replies</th>
<th>Partial replies</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hours online</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>days online (Status: 13.04.2015)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 – Questionnaire Postings*
3. Questionnaire

Gender Related Perceptions of Leadership

As part of our Master thesis at Linnaeus University in Kalmar, Sweden, we, Valerie Brockmann and Andreas Pfleger, are investigating gender related perceptions of and attitudes towards Leadership. All answers are treated in an anonymous and confidential manner under the supervision of Dr. Dr. Philippe Daudt, head of the MSc Leadership and Management Programme at Linnaeus University. During the following questionnaire we kindly ask you to express your personal feelings regarding the topic Leadership and Gender.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at av.masterthesis@gmail.com.

There are 15 questions in this survey

Basic Data

Please state your gender. *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Female
- Male

Please select your age. *
Please choose only one of the following:

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31
- 32
Gender and Leadership – Appendix

Do you currently have any kind of job? *
Please choose only one of the following:
- Yes
- No

Have you attended a University (with or without the achievement of a degree)? *
Please choose only one of the following:
- Yes
- No

Leadership Perceptions

Leadership: What does it mean to you? Please state your meaning in only one word. *
Please write your answer here:

We asked you what Leadership means to you. Does the word you stated have a rather female connotation or a rather male connotation to you? *
Please choose only one of the following:
- Rather female connotation
- Rather male connotation
## Leadership attributes

Please identify the attributes listed below either as rather strengths of female leaders or rather strengths of male leaders. *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Rather a female strength</th>
<th>Rather a male strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being communicative</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining a vision</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating followers</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being charismatic</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting as a role model</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being transformational</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting followers</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earning trust from followers</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a team player</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk taking</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you can think of any further leadership attributes, please add them here and identify them as rather strengths of female leaders or rather strengths of male leaders.

Please write your answer(s) here:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rather a female strength</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather a female strength</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather a male strength</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather a male strength</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ranking

Please select the leader attribute which you consider most important. *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Being communicative
- Defining a vision
- Motivating team members
- Being charismatic
- Setting goals
- Acting as a role model
- Being transformational
- Trusting team members
- Earning trust from team members
- Being a team player
- Risk taking

Please select the leader attribute which you consider second most important. *
Please choose only one of the following:

- Being communicative
- Defining a vision
- Motivating team members
- Being charismatic
- Setting goals
- Acting as a role model
- Being transformational
- Trusting team members
- Earning trust from team members
- Being a team player
- Risk taking
Please select the leader attribute which you consider third most important.

Please choose only one of the following:

- Being communicative
- Defining a vision
- Motivating team members
- Being charismatic
- Setting goals
- Acting as a role model
- Being transformational
- Trusting team members
- Earning trust from team members
- Being a team player
- Risk taking

---

Ranking Part 2

Please select the one leader attribute which you consider least important. *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Being communicative
- Defining a vision
- Motivating team members
- Being charismatic
- Setting goals
- Acting as a role model
- Being transformational
- Trusting team members
- Earning trust from team members
- Being a team player
- Risk taking
Your View

Would you rather be lead by a female leader or by a male leader? *

Please choose only one of the following:

☐ Female leader
☐ Male leader

Your View 2.0

In your opinion, who makes the better leaders? Females or Males? *

Please choose only one of the following:

☐ Females make the better leaders
☐ Males make the better leaders

Final Step

If you are interested in taking part in individual interviews regarding the topic Leadership and Gender, please state your E-mail address below, otherwise please “Submit” to complete this survey.

Please write your answer here:

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey.
If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at av.masterthesis@gmail.com

Submit your survey. Thank you for completing this survey.
4. Examples of Academic Communication Ways used

On the following pages you will find an exemplary expert of our communication efforts as part of the dissemination of our research questionnaire. As described in our thesis we used a number of communication channels to reach out to individuals, academic and professional institutions as well as all those interested in the topic of leadership to facilitate responses to our questionnaire. Whilst we did not receive comments on all our posts or replies to all the E-Mails we did send out, since our research is a qualitative one, the quality of the responses and insights we as a research team gained from them was much more important than the frequency of said communication efforts. The examples listed on the following pages depict the variety of institutions we contacted and contains examples of replies which fulfilled our hopes of support and input as well as those which did not. It should be added that those individuals who did reach out to us out of their own interest were in most cases happy to engage in a constructive dialogue and exchanged several messages with us. The resources, such as academic articles, books and theoretical models, which those questionnaire respondents who did reach out to us recommended were a source of inspiration and aided us in better understanding the answers which we received within the framework of our questionnaire. It should also be added that those questionnaire respondents who informed us that they did not complete our questionnaire due to the nature of the questions we asked, influenced the interpretation of the results and the validity of our research to an equally important degree as those who completed the questionnaire to the full extent. We as a research team are of the opinion that only partially completed questionnaires combined with a message from the corresponding respondent, outlining why she or he did not complete the entire questionnaire, reasons being whatever they were, offers at least a similar of insight as analyzing the results of the fully completed questionnaires. The reason for this is that taking the time to read the posts we disseminated in social media networks, then going on the access the questionnaire and at least partially completing it and in addition to that taking the time to comment and publicly, or in a private message to us, state the reasons for not completing the questionnaire takes at least as much time and represents and at least equal amount of interest for and personal investment in the research topic on the side of the questionnaire respondent as “simply” filling out the entire questionnaire.
4.1. Forwarding Inquiry

Gender and Leadership - a research project
3 Nachrichten

Andreas Valerie <av.masterthesis@gmail.com> 1. April 2015 um 11:37
An: alpenquiries@jbs.cam.ac.uk

Dear Ms. Wheeler-Héau,

My name is Andreas Pfleger and I am a Masters Student in the Management with Leadership in International Context Programme at Linnéuniversitetet in Kalmar, Sweden.

Together with my course colleague Valerie Brockmann I am co-authoring a thesis for which we are investigating gender related perceptions of and attitudes towards Leadership. We have designed a questionnaire (link: http://fhkremslimesurvey.cloudapp.net/limesurvey/index.php?r=survey/index/sid/438673/lang/en) and would be very thankful if you could help us to reach a broad audience and receive a large amount of replies.

We would be very thankful if you were willing to include the link to our questionnaire in your next communication with the staff and or students of your leadership related academic programmes. We believe that taking part in our survey will be a rewarding experience for them – and it only takes a few minutes to complete.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best regards from Sweden,

Andreas Pfleger

PS: You can find out more about the co-authors of the above mentioned thesis by visiting their LinkedIn profiles:

Valerie Brockmann: https://se.linkedin.com/in/valeriebrockmann

Andreas Pfleger: http://at.linkedin.com/in/andreaspfleger

Allison Wheeler-Heau <a.wheeler-heau@jbs.cam.ac.uk> 1. April 2015 um 12:46
An: Andreas Valerie <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>
Hello Andreas

Thank you for sending this through.

I regret to confirm that we will not be able to send this to our staff and participants of our programmes. We would only be able to send out research related questionnaires for our own Faculty I am afraid, and not on behalf of any other educational institute.

I wish you luck in your research.

With best regards

Allison

Allison Wheeler-Héau

Director of Open Programmes
Director of the Cambridge Advanced Leadership Programme
Cambridge Judge Business School Executive Education
Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1AG
United Kingdom

Email: a.wheeler-heau@jbs.cam.ac.uk

Direct Line: +44 (0) 1223 765855  Mobile: +44 (0)7879 116776

Fax: +44 (0) 1223 339701
Dear Allison,

Many thanks for getting back to us so quickly even though the news are not what we were hoping for. I of course understand your policy and understand your reasons for having it in place.

Have a nice afternoon,

Andreas

---

Thank you for your interest in Caterpillar Inc. We regret that we cannot respond personally to each of the many requests we receive. To learn more about our company, explore our website - www.caterpillar.com. To learn more about our products, explore our website - www.cat.com.

You may use the Dealer Locator on our website: http://www.cat.com/en_US/support/dealer-locator.html to find additional contact information.

We appreciate your understanding.

Regards,

Caterpillar Inc. | Customer Interaction Center | www.caterpillar.com
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of Caterpillar,

My name is Andreas Pfleger and I am a Masters Student in the Management with Leadership in International Context Programme at Linnéuniversitetet in Kalmar, Sweden. Together with my course colleague Valerie Brockmann I am co-authoring a thesis for which we are investigating gender related perceptions of and attitudes towards Leadership. We have designed a questionnaire (link: http://fhkremslimesurvey.cloudapp.net/limesurvey/index.php?r=survey/index/sid/438673/lang/en) and would be very thankful if you could help us to reach a broad audience and receive a large amount of replies by including the link to our questionnaire in your next communication with the participants and alumni of your leadership development programme. We believe that taking part in our survey will be a rewarding experience for them – and it only takes a few minutes to complete. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best regards from Sweden,

Andreas Pfleger

PS: You can find out more about the co-authors of the above mentioned thesis by visiting their LinkedIn profiles:
Valerie Brockmann: https://se.linkedin.com/in/valeriebrockmann
Andreas Pfleger: http://at.linkedin.com/in/andreaspfleger
4.2. LinkedIn Communication Lines

Valerie Brockmann & Andreas Pfleger
Gender and Leadership – Appendix

Edna Milov
External Consultant at Micro Credit Foundation

I agree with Ethel Thorney. Also, check the Risk Congruency Theory (if you already haven’t) – it could be very helpful for your research. And good luck!

Like • Reply privately • Flag as inappropriate • 21 days ago

Andreas Pfleger

Is always looking for challenges.

Dor Edita,

thank you for sharing your thoughts on the leadership and the gender leadership topic. I will definitely read up on risk congruency theory. Thanks for pointing it out to me.

Have a nice evening,

Andreas

Delete • 21 days ago

Edna Milov
External Consultant at Micro Credit Foundation

If you wish, I can send you some articles on the respective theory. Please send me an e-mail to ethelmorley@gmail.com. Did I could help?

Like • Reply privately • Flag as inappropriate • 21 days ago

Andreas Pfleger

Is always looking for challenges.

Dear Edita,

that would be great/nice thanks for your support. I am sending the e-mail now.

Andreas

Delete • 21 days ago

Anna S.
Logistical Officer at International Medical Corps

I went through the survey. I really doubt that the fact of making the question Set specific qualifications of the leader among the women and men in my opinion of a successful leader does not have a gender.

Like • Reply privately • Flag as inappropriate • 30 days ago

Andreas Pfleger

Is always looking for challenges.

Dear Anna,

thanks for sharing your thoughts on the topic and our questionnaire.

Kind regards,

Andreas

Delete • 21 days ago

Anna S. thanks this.

Add a comment...
4.3. *Newsletter Inquiry*

Gender and Leadership - a research project

Andreas Valerie <av.masterthesis@gmail.com> 23. März 2015 um 18:22

An: Richard@contentedcows.com, Bill@contentedcows.com

Dear Richard, Dear Bill,

My name is Andreas Pfleger and I am a Masters Student in the Management with Leadership in International Context Programme at Linnéuniversitetet in Kalmar, Sweden.

Together with my course colleague Valerie Brockmann I am co-authoring a thesis on for which we are investigating gender related perceptions of and attitudes towards Leadership. We have designed a questionnaire (link: [http://fhkremslimesurvey.cloudapp.net/limesurvey/index.php?r=survey/index/sid/438673/lang/en](http://fhkremslimesurvey.cloudapp.net/limesurvey/index.php?r=survey/index/sid/438673/lang/en)) and would be very thankful if you could help us to reach a broad audience and receive a large amount of replies. We would be very thankful if you were willing to include the link to our questionnaire in your newsletter. We believe that taking part in our survey will be a rewarding experience for the readers of your newsletter – and it only takes a few minutes to complete.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best regards from Sweden,

Andreas Pfleger

PS: You can find out more about the co-authors of the above mentioned thesis by visiting their LinkedIn profiles:

Valerie Brockmann: [https://se.linkedin.com/in/valeriebrockmann](https://se.linkedin.com/in/valeriebrockmann)

Andreas Pfleger: [http://at.linkedin.com/in/andreaspfleger](http://at.linkedin.com/in/andreaspfleger)
Hello Andreas,

Thank you for your email. We would be happy to include your survey in a link in our next Fresh Milk Newsletter, which will probably be published in mid-April. I have personally completed the survey. It looks like an interesting and meaningful research project. I have taken the liberty of adding your email address, av.masterthesis@gmail.com to our subscription list, so that you can see the feature when it is published.

Thanks again for getting in touch with us. And best wishes for your project, and your continuing education.

Richard

Richard Hadden, CSP
Co-author, Contented Cows STILL Give Better Milk

904-720-0870
Richard@ContentedCows.com
http://ContentedCows.com
twitter.com/ContentedCows

Check out our video gallery

Keynotes, Leader and Team Training, Employee Surveys
Connecting People to Profit

---

Dear Richard,

Many thanks for your quick reply and your willingness to support our thesis project by including our questionnaire in your newsletter. You doing so will definitely help elevate our research to a new level.

Thank you also for including our E-Mail address in your mailing list.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or need any further information.

Thanks again and have a wonderful weekend.

Andreas
28. März 2015 um 13:54

Richard Hadden, CSP
Co-author, Contented Cows STILL Give Better Milk

904-720-0870
Richard@ContentedCows.com
http://ContentedCows.com
twitter.com/ContentedCows

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Keynotes, Leader and Team Training, Employee Surveys
Connecting People to Profit

From: Andreas Valerie [mailto:av.masterthesis@gmail.com]
Sent: Saturday, March 28, 2015 5:51 AM
To: Richard Hadden
Subject: Re: Gender and Leadership - a research project

10. April 2015 um 11:59

Andreas Valerie <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>
An: Richard Hadden <richard@contendedcows.com>

Dear Richard,

I hope all is well with you, I am writing with a few questions regarding your Newsletter “Fresh Milk”.

First off, is there any further information you would like me to provide about our research project, the academic programme we are part of or ourselves as authors? I just want to make sure we do everything we can to make you including our project in the newsletter as convenient for you as possible.

Additionally, would you be willing to share with us the number of subscribers to your newsletter and, if you can, the approximate mailing date you are aiming for.

Thanks again for helping us out.

All the best from Sweden,

Andreas
### 4.4. Respondents Feedback One

| Gender Related Perceptions of Leadership: Comments on Survey Instrument |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 3 Nachrichten                                   |                         |

**Samuel Kolawole Olowe** <olowesk@yahoo.com>  
An: "av.masterthesis@gmail.com" <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>  
30. März 2015 um 14:02

Dear researchers,

I want to congratulate you on the design of your instrument and the job well done. However, I wish to make the following observations as a researcher in gender studies as well. There are some of the questions that does not provide room for the respondent to freely disagree with your comments as you have not provided any room for alternative answer apart from either ticking male or female. For instance, the question that states that "We asked you what leadership means to you. Does the word you stated have a rather female connotation or a rather male connotation." What happens where the respondent wanted to say does not applicable to either of the two.

In addition, the same thing is applicable to the table that only limited the ratings of the respondent to only either Female or Male. What happens when any of the attributes does not belong to either female or male. How will the respondent do the rating.

I want to at this juncture recommend Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to the researchers if you have never come across it. The instrument will assist further. Please feel free to discuss more on this issue as I equally had my Ph.D in this area and I used the BSRI to carry out my survey.

Once again, well done.

Sam.

Sent from my iPad

---

**Andreas Valerie** <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>  
An: Samuel Kolawole Olowe <olowesk@yahoo.com>  
1. April 2015 um 11:46

Dear Sam,

First off many thanks for taking the time to complete our questionnaire and contacting us to express your thoughts on our research and the topic of gender and leadership.

With regards to your comments, allow me to say that by not giving questionnaire respondents the option to select "neither or both genders" when it comes to gender-relating the leadership attributes which we selected, as well as the "one word describing leadership" we asked for, we are aiming to uncover and explore the underlying, often unconscious perceptions of and attitudes towards leadership and the inherent leadership language that people carry inside them.

Thank you for pointing us into the direction of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, we will definitely check it out.
Please let us know if you have any questions or further comments on our research. Also, would you potentially be interested in answering a few open E-Mail questions with regards to leadership and gender? We are currently evaluating this method of collecting more in depth qualitative data.

Many thanks and best regards,

Andreas

---

**Samuel Kolawole Olowe** <solowesk@yahoo.com>  
An: Andreas Valerie <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>  
4. April 2015 um 13:59

Dear Andreas,
Thanks for your mail.  
Please feel free at any time to send any mail or request as I will be readily available to make my inputs. In addition to looking for BSRI, you may also look out for the manual to the instrument which will help you in having better understanding to the scoring and other details about the instrument.  
Wishing you more success.  
Looking forward to hear more from you.  
Thanks.  
Sam.

Sent from my iPad

---

**4.5. Respondents Feedback Two**

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**Role Congruity Theory**  
4 Nachrichten

**Andreas Valerie** <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>  
An: editamiftari@gmail.com  
23. März 2015 um 18:26

Dear Edita,

thanks again for offering your support by sharing information on the role congruity theory we mentioned. We did in fact touch upon this theory as well as part of our academic programme, I am very interested to see articles or other materials that you consider valuable.
Many thanks again for your support and taking the time to complete our survey and get in touch with us,

Andreas

---

**Edita Miftari**

An: Andreas Valerie <av.masterthesis@gmail.com>

Dear Andreas,

Thank you for your e-mail and for your interest in the topic.

In the attachment you can find some of the articles I find useful for discussing issues you and your colleague are addressing. If there is any other way I can help, do not hesitate to contact me.

Regarding your survey, as I said, I agree with the comment I mentioned, thus I could not complete it since I could not answer most of the questions. If you by any chance change your questionnaire, by all means let me know.

Good luck!

Best,

Edita

---

**Freelance Researcher**

**on Gender and Security Intersection**

M.A. in Gender Studies (Central European University)
B.A. in Security Studies (Sarajevo University)

Phone: +387 61 856384
E-mail: editamiftari@gmail.com (FaceTime)
Skype: edita.miftari
Twitter: @01100110EM
Facebook: Doktorica Hu
Address: Slatina 3, 75000 Tuzla, Bosna i Hercegovina

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Please *don't print* this e-mail unless you really need to. Thank you!

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9 Anhänge

- **Gender Bias in Leader Evaluations - Merging Implicit Theories and Role Congruity Perspectives.pdf**
  549K

- **Gender Differences In Leader Emergence Persist Even For Dominant Women - An Updated Confirmation Of Role Congruity Theory.pdf**
  87K

- **Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders.pdf**
  572K

- **A Role Congruity Perspective on Prejudice Toward Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin.pdf**
  196K

- **Does gender bias against female leaders persist - Quantitative and qualitative data from a large-scale survey.pdf**
  468K
Dear Edita,

thanks for the articles, I will definitely reach out to you if we come up with further questions.
No worries about not finishing the questionnaire, having people give a reason for why they couldn’t finish it is almost as interesting as a completely filled out questionnaire.

Thanks again, have a nice evening.
Andreas

Dear Andreas,

I agree - it is a valid indicator of how we notice and experience gender stereotypes.

You are very welcome!

Best,
Edita

>Editita Miftari
--
Freelance Researcher
on Gender and Security Intersection

M.A. in Gender Studies (Central European University)
B.A. in Security Studies (Sarajevo University)

Phone: +387 61 856384
E-mail: editamiftari@gmail.com (FaceTime)
Skype: edita.miftari
Twitter: @01100110EM
Facebook: Doktorica Hu
## 5. Thesis Process Meeting Logbook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Meeting</th>
<th>Duration (Hours/Minutes/Seconds)</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04.03.2015</td>
<td>00:16:25</td>
<td>Discussion of survey tools, decision which one to use and for Andreas to take the lead in implementing the questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.03.2015</td>
<td>02:12:24</td>
<td>Extensive testing and detailed analysis of questionnaire, rearranging of question order, categories, wording etc. Testing of completed questionnaire, ultimately putting online of final trial questionnaire and posting in YBB Facebook group to get test answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.03.2015</td>
<td>00:34:00</td>
<td>Final editing of the questionnaire, final trial runs, E-mail to Philippe asking for final questionnaire feedback and go ahead, discussion of progress report 1, next Skype call scheduled for tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.03.2015</td>
<td>00:24:05</td>
<td>Discussion of progress report 1, discussion of readings for upcoming week, discussion thesis elements (add personal perspective and experience of topic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.03.2015</td>
<td>00:13:15</td>
<td>Final discussion and editing of progress report one, scheduled the next call to discuss further readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.03.2015</td>
<td>00:13:12</td>
<td>Discussed progress report 1 feedback, discussed final questionnaire steps, email to Philippe, scheduled next call to discuss reading progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.03.2015</td>
<td>00:43:20</td>
<td>Discussed questionnaire progress and further steps, outlined topics for writing and divided up topics,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.03.2015</td>
<td>00:33:32</td>
<td>Discussed corrections of last thesis edit, discussed evaluation of questionnaire results, discussed further dissemination of questionnaire, discussed and enhanced thesis chapter structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.04.2015</td>
<td>00:31:18</td>
<td>Evaluation of questionnaire, sending out of further questions via e-mail, thesis structure including appendix, next appointment set, personal perspective of leadership to be included in personal perspective of gender topic, input and feedback from Prof. Surböck discussed, progress report action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.04.2015</td>
<td>00:36:52</td>
<td>Progress report discussion, further structure discussion and adjustments, research evaluation discussion, appendix was compiled as far as possible, revised reading list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.04.2015</td>
<td>00:44:48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valerie Brockmann & Andreas Pfleger
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.04.2015</td>
<td>00:19:43</td>
<td>Discussed progress report final steps, discussed and compiled appendix, discussed questions to ask at progress report feedback session, discussed and evaluated structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.04.2015</td>
<td>00:40:29</td>
<td>Discussed evaluation of questionnaire and timing for data evaluation, further working progress discussed and topics distributed, discussion of questionnaire postings and closing deadline, discussion of progress report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.04.2015</td>
<td>00:50:57</td>
<td>Discussed and implemented progress report 2 feedback as much as possible on the spot, divided remaining tasks and decided on further steps to be taken, set writing schedule and next Skype call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.04.2015</td>
<td>03:33:10</td>
<td>Discussion and review of all data collected, data evaluation, creation of graphs and discussion of further writing process for the data evaluation part of our thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.05.2015</td>
<td>00:15:51</td>
<td>Discussed data graph writing process and further steps, scheduled next Skype call and talked about the thesis presentation to be held in Kalmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.05.2015</td>
<td>00:15:59</td>
<td>Discussion of progress and further steps for the completion of the data evaluation part of the thesis, preparations for thesis presentation in Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.05.2015</td>
<td>00:16:21</td>
<td>Discussion of days progress, further plans for analysis and connecting the dots in terms of data evaluation, discussion of final presentation to be prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.05.2015</td>
<td>00:18:04</td>
<td>Discussion of days progress and formatting of thesis and other relevant materials for final presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.05.2015</td>
<td>00:21:11</td>
<td>Discussion of days progress and formatting of thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.05.2015</td>
<td>01:19:30</td>
<td>Final discussion of days progress and final thesis formatting issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.05.2015</td>
<td>00:19:50</td>
<td>Final editing and discussion. Completion of the thesis project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.05.2014</td>
<td>02:53:54</td>
<td>Final editing after the Thesis defense, preparation for publication in the Diva Portal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 – Thesis Process Meeting Logbook*