The Dynamics of Developing Leadership Communication in Organisations

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To all those who struggle, but still do
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Sundsvall, August 2020

Sandra Bergman
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Abstract

Leadership development is an area which is a top priority for organisations. While communication has historically been viewed as one of many leadership activities, it has recently been suggested to be more central to, even constitutive of, leadership. It has also been put forth that communication researchers may provide a means to develop new theoretical frameworks from which to develop leadership.

The purpose of this thesis is to further the theoretical understanding of communicative leadership development, specifically in the form of training efforts. Furthermore, the goal is to provide a new understanding to practitioners who are working with the development of communicative leadership.

This is a compilation thesis that consists of three papers. An initial literature review shows that the development of leadership communication receives interest from fields related to health, for instance, from nursing teams, businesses, the military and construction. On the other hand, the subject doesn’t receive as much attention from the field of communication studies.

The results of the thesis are based on interviews with managers and communication professionals in two organisations. The findings show several benefits from having communication professionals take on a role as communication trainers, such as increased visibility of the communication department within the organisation and the opportunity to continue to support the leaders after the trainings. Additionally, a framework of adult learning is used to analyse the interviews, which highlights several points of adult learning that are relevant to the development of leadership communication.

Based on the empirical data and the literature review, a model of communicative leadership development is suggested. This model is an amalgamation of what was learned from the three papers and summarises the understanding that was gained. Moreover, the model should provide practitioners with a basis for developing communicative leadership trainings as well as for developing the theory of communicative leadership.

Keywords: organisational communication, communicative leadership, training, development
Summary in Swedish

En av de högsta prioriteringarna i organisationer idag är ledarskapsutveckling. Historiskt sett har kommunikation betraktats som en sekundär funktion av ledarskap, men på senare år har forskare argumenterat för att kommunikation är mer centralt än så, möjligen det som konstituerar ledarskap. Det har dessutom föreslagits att kommunikationsfältet kan bidra till nya teoretiska ramverk för ledarskapsutveckling.

Syftet med denna avhandling är att utöka den teoretiska kunskapen kring kommunikativ ledarskapsutveckling. Vidare, är målet att bidra med ny kunskap till praktiker som arbetar med att utveckla kommunikativt ledarskap.


Sammanfattningsvis ger de tre artiklarna en grund för en modell i kommunikativ ledarskapsutveckling. Modellen är ett resultat av lärdomar från alla tre artiklarna och summerar aktuell forskning. Vidare bör modellen kunna användas som en grund för praktiker som vill utveckla kommunikativt ledarskap.
List of papers

This licentiate thesis is based on the following three papers, herein referred to by their numbers:


Authors’ contribution

**Paper 1:** Data collection and processing of the first part of the literature review was done collectively by the five authors. The second literature review was done by the thesis author. Writing was done by all five authors, but the majority was done by the thesis author who is also the corresponding author.

**Paper 2:** Single author paper.

**Paper 3:** Single author paper.

Additional work


(Also reworked and submitted to journal, under review)
Preface

The central theme of this thesis is leadership communication and the development thereof. During the three years of work on this thesis, I have time and time again started by explaining the importance of communication to leadership and organisations. Intuitively, the connection is obvious; there are also a multitude of studies which concur. For instance, leaders have been found to spend 70–90% of their time in communication (Tengblad, 2006), a number which is unlikely to decrease given the increasing globalisation of modern organisations. A communicative leader is one who not only engages in communication but is also a good communicator and someone the co-workers experience as open and engaged in dialogue (Hamrin, 2016a). Communicative leadership has also been linked to beneficial effects such as increased employee health (Bäckström, Ingelsson, & Johansson, 2016). Indeed, either implicitly or explicitly, communication is at the heart of leadership (Barge, 2014; Hamrin, Johansson, & Jahn, 2016).

The thesis is written within the field of organisational communication. I also philosophically consider myself a pragmatist, and thus the thesis and purpose are constructed so that they may provide clear practical implications. This is, nevertheless, achieved by the use of sound and appropriate theoretical foundations. But the ultimate goal is to allow real life application of the findings.

The thesis is qualitative in nature as it is largely based on interviews. Two of the three appended papers are based on interviews and their understanding is increased through observations and content analysis. While the thesis does not aim to be generalisable, a mixed methods approach is often beneficial to the study of leadership (Klenke, 2016).

There are almost as many leadership styles as there are leaders, but, while leadership practice is something personal, communication is always central. In this thesis, I will not present theories of leadership other than those central to the thesis, such as communicative leadership. For an excellent review of leadership theories and the historic development of the field of leadership research, please see, for instance, Northouse (2016).

My hope is that by presenting a model of communicative leadership development, this thesis may allow communication professionals and organisations to develop their leadership communication. Furthermore, I hope that it may help students who are interested in leadership communication.
1 Introduction

In 2018, a staggering $366 billion dollars was spent on leadership development (Westfall, 2019), a number that is increasing yearly. Leadership development is indeed an important question for organisations. In a survey of around 500 executives, leadership development was listed as both a current and future priority (Gurdjian, Halbeisen, & Lane, 2014). In that survey, almost two-thirds of the executives listed leadership development as their number one concern. Others question the effectiveness of leadership development. In a study by Day & Dragoni (2015, p. 134), up to two-thirds of senior leaders considered their organisations’ leadership development practices to be ‘broken’.

In early leadership research, communication was viewed as a secondary component of leadership, although a growing body of research viewed communication as central to the leadership process (Jian & Fairhurst, 2016). It has been suggested that leadership is enacted through communication (Johansson, Miller, & Hamrin, 2011, 2014; Tengblad, 2006). As such, communication is not only a central issue for leaders, but may also provide new theoretical knowledge for leadership development. Martin (2017) wrote that ‘The discipline of communication provides excellent resources for those developing theoretical frameworks from which to teach leadership’ (p. 2). Martin thereby suggests that not only may communication be an important skill for leaders, but that communication scholars may provide new insights into how to develop leadership.

Communication is connected to organisational results (Ruck & Welch, 2012), and communication training can support leaders in their role (Hamrin, 2016a; Nordblom & Hamrefors, 2007). Communication professionals may also be able to contribute to organisational success by acting as coaches and educators in communication (Zerfass & Volk, 2018). However, the contribution of the communication department needs to be visualised (Falkheimer et al., 2017); it is often not understood by other managers (Simcic Brønn, 2014) and is even undervalued by the departments themselves (Buhmann, Likely, & Geddes, 2018).

While communication is at the heart of organisational life, most leadership theories place it in the periphery of focus. According to Schneider et al., communication scholars haven’t ‘systematically explored the prerequisites of effective leadership’ (2015).

In all, leadership communication and leadership development are both important for modern organisations, but leadership communication
behaviour has not been afforded enough attention. As such, this thesis will begin with the following purpose statement.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions
The purpose of this thesis is to further the theoretical understanding of communicative leadership development, specifically in the form of training efforts. In addition, the goal is to provide new understanding to practitioners who are working with the development of communicative leadership, the aim of which is to expand the theoretical concept of communicative leadership development.

In order to answer this purpose, the following research questions will be answered:

1. How is current research approaching communicative leadership development, by choice of theoretical grounding as well as methodological design, and what results are identified?
2. How is the use of communication professionals as trainers impacting the role of communication professionals?
3. What are the participant-perceived changes in their own approaches and practices after participating in communicative leadership training?
4. What lessons can be learnt from using a framework of adult learning to evaluate a communicative leadership development programme?

1.2 Connecting the Research Questions to the Papers
The first research question is answered in the first paper through the use of a literature review approach. The second and third research questions are answered in the second paper which is based on interviews. The fourth research question is answered in the third paper and is also based on interviews. The overall purpose of the thesis will be answered in the introductory paper (kappa) in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

1.3 Background
This thesis is done within the scope of the project ‘Communicative Leadership Development—analysing value creation in two business organisations’, funded by the Swedish Knowledge Foundation (dnr 2016/0159). The project group consists of researchers from the two departments Media and Communication and Quality Management, both at Mid Sweden University.
Moreover, representatives from two organisations, AB Volvo and Sandvik Machining Solutions AB, are part of the research group. The project started in 2017 and ended in early 2020. All material used in this thesis was collected within this project.

1.4 Thesis Structure
This thesis is a compilation thesis consisting of three papers (listed above and summarised below) and an introductory paper. The introductory paper is structured as follows:

**Chapter 1** Introduces the research area and the project, research questions and structure of the thesis
**Chapter 2** Provides an overview of related research and theoretical assumptions
**Chapter 3** Presents the methodology of the thesis as well as a discussion of philosophical grounding, pragmatism in organisational communication research, research ethics and scientific outreach
**Chapter 4** Summarises the three papers which form the body of this thesis
**Chapter 5** Presents some of the key findings of the papers
**Chapter 6** Discusses the findings in more depth than in the appended papers
**Chapter 7** Presents the conclusions and further research

Chapter 7 is followed by references and the three appended papers (printed version only).
2 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical starting points used in the papers will be presented. Firstly, leadership communication will be presented in a broad way which is followed by the specific concept of communicative leadership development. Next, some key theoretical points of leadership development will be followed by theories of adult learning. Lastly, an overview of theories related to the role of communication professionals will end the theoretical chapter. As this is an introductory paper, the theories will also be presented in an introductory way in order to provide background to the appended papers (printed version) and the findings thereof.

2.1 Leadership Communication

During the 20th century, the bulk of research has equated leadership and management and have therefore seen leadership as a tool towards organisational effectiveness (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014b; Hamrin, 2016a).

Although there are many different ways to define leadership, there are two major schools of thought (Northouse, 2016). Leadership can be viewed either as person dependent (i.e., traits) or as a multidirectional process. The evolution of leadership research has moved from looking at leadership from a trait point of view to a process point of view as shown below. This is also the starting point for the concept of communicative leadership, which views leadership as relational and co-constructed between leader and employees (Hamrin et al., 2016).

An adaptation of J.P. Kotters model from 1990 (Northouse, 2016)
As shown in the model, the early trait approach to leadership viewed different leadership qualities as the definition of leadership and followers were simple recipients of the leadership input. Since the 1980s, the process approach to leadership has been dominant, and leadership in this approach is defined as the interaction between leader and followers (Hamrin, 2016a; Northouse, 2016).

Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014b) described leadership communication as both transmissive and focused on meaning, treating leadership as relational which distributes weighting between both leader and follower. They further stated that due to this duality of leadership communication research (meaning-centred and transmissive), researchers ask very different questions depending on their own view of communication. They also wrote that the meaning-centred view on communication is essential when studying leadership sensemaking, framing and identity.

Framing/sense-giving and sense-making are the two main components of discourse (Hamrin, 2016a), which is related to linguistic and cognitive psychology. Discourse is sometimes equated with communication, but a way to separate the two is that we act in communication through discourse (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014b).

Discourse is both what is said and the situation in which it is said: this means that it is not only the choice of communication method (i.e., voice, text, non-verbal, etc.) or the message or dialogue being relayed but is also the situation of the communication (Johansson et al., 2011). In short, it is the totality of the communication experience that makes up the discourse. Thus, the organisational social structures, worldviews, norms and rules that make up the discursive landscape of that particular setting will fundamentally affect communication (Hamrin, 2016a).

While definition of concepts is important, Jian and Fairhurst (2016) suggested that there is no need for a universal definition of leadership. They motivated this by the disparate nature of leadership in different contexts, such as in a street gang versus a political party versus a commercial organisation. In this thesis, however, I have chosen to use the following definition: Leadership is a process involving more than one person which consists of influential acts through communication (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014b).

2.1.1 Communicative Leadership
The concept of communicative leadership, which was first suggested by practitioners (Hamrefors, 2010; Nordblom & Hamrefors, 2007) and then expanded and further theorised by Johansson et al. (2011), will form a large part of the foundation for this thesis. I’ve chosen to more broadly combine
this with theories of leadership communication and leadership development. In communicative leadership research, it is proposed that leadership is enacted through the communication between leader and employees that shapes relations and affects organisational performance (Johansson et al., 2011, 2014).

Building on the understanding that communication is central to the leadership process (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012), a communicative leader is defined as ‘one who engages employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision-making, and is perceived as open and involved’ (Johansson et al., 2014, p. 155). This definition puts a high demand on the communicative leader, and trainings are therefore one way to aspire towards this lofty definition. Several key principles for communicative leadership are also presented by Johansson et al., which sets the concept apart from a non-communication focused view of leadership in several aspects:

- Communicative leaders coach and enable employees to be self-managing.
- Communicative leaders provide structures that facilitate the work.
- Communicative leaders set clear expectations.
- Communicative leaders are approachable, respectful and express concern for employees.
- Communicative leaders actively engage in problem solving, they follow-up on feedback and advocate for the unit.
- Communicative leaders convey direction and assist others in achieving their goals.
- Communicative leaders actively engage in framing of the messages and events.
- Communicative leaders enable and support sense-making.

Additionally, communicative leaders are considered to be good communicators by their co-worker; together with the above points, this emphasises the process view of leadership. In order to properly study this, the employee perspective should not be ignored. However, in this thesis, the focus is centred on the trainings and subsequently the leaders are the main source of empirical data.

According to Tourish and Robson (2006), upward communication is essential for organisational success and should be completely imbedded in the way the organisation operates, which highlights how communicative leaders may effect organisational outcomes by encouraging multidirectional
communication. Leaders also need to practice the receipt of critiques, both positive and negative, as leaders in general tend to turn a blind eye to criticism while simultaneously over-valuing positive feedback (Tourish & Robson, 2006).

Communicative leadership development also contains recommendations for practitioners who wish to develop communicative leadership within the organisation. The four recommendations are to determine values, regular assessment, coaching systems and collaboration between Human Resources (HR) and the communication department (Johansson et al., 2011).

The determination of values suggests taking the various organisational levels’ values and histories into account and takes the organisational culture into consideration. It also emphasises that each unit may have unique values and needs and that these should be considered when implementing a communicative leadership development effort (Hamrin, 2016b).

Regular assessment points to the need for developed instruments which are assessed for their validity and warns against selecting just a few items from an instrument (Johansson et al., 2011). The assessment should consider the leader’s position and responsibilities, and the feedback from the assessment should give insights into areas of improvement as well as strengths.

Coaching systems are part of an effort to create buy-in for the communication values through coaching, socialisation and training (Johansson et al., 2011). This is suggested to help avoid short-term changes in behaviour which are motivated by factors other than true buy-in to the new way of working, for instance, to boost salary.

Lastly, increased collaboration between HR and communication units is suggested to help alleviate the problem of ‘who owns’ the issue of communication training which might otherwise arise (Bäckström et al., 2016; Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014).

According to Jian and Dalisay (2018), leadership plays a significant role in employee psychological health. They proposed that communication practices are one of the underlying mechanisms behind this and tested a model in which the conversational quality and frequency were measured. Their model showed significant predictive effects, namely, that conversational quality (reported/experienced) was directly linked to psychological health. Communicative leadership has also been shown to improve experienced employee health by similar underlying mechanisms, as in quality management (Bäckström et al., 2016).
2.1.2 Leadership research, some critiques

There are several ramifications of leadership and leadership research that are seldom discussed but may be relevant to keep in mind. Tourish (2013), in his critique of transformational leadership research, claimed that leadership theory needs to change as it over-emphasises leaders, thereby pacifying all others: making them feel as if their actions will have little or no impact. He also argued that this overstatement of the importance of leadership helps as a justification for ‘megalomaniac’ leader types that are convinced that powerful and visionary leadership is always helpful, healthy and wise.

Another issue that’s been raised is the so-called ‘Prozac leadership’ in which excessive positivity of the leader blinds the team/followers to the detrimental effects of a situation/plan of action. This minimises dissent and dumbs-down the decision-making process, perhaps even altering individual or group identity (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014b). This is also an issue regarding credibility, often identified as a key part of functional leadership relationships. If leaders are ‘sugar coating’ challenges in an effort to build support, this may be harmful to the group (Johansson et al., 2011).

In addition to being overly positive, there may also be issues with leaders/ individuals framing a problem in a certain way to motivate their own actions (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014b). This is something that is doubly troublesome if you have the megalomaniac leader type that Tourish (2013) warned about, as they create environments (possibly with the help of leadership research) in which they are rarely questioned.

Fairhurst and Connaughton further discussed the problem with early discourse studies which connote male characteristics and denote those characteristics that are typically female or non-Caucasian in nature (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014b). This is something that also affects other parts of leadership theory, as proven by several studies including that of Watson and Hoffman (2004) which showed gender-biased perceptions in groups evaluating male and female leaders (Northouse, 2016).

In sum, there are several critiques of leadership theories in general and communicative leadership in particular. While I agree with these critiques, I also see that communication is too important a part of leadership to be left in the periphery as has often been the case in previous leadership research. While communicative leadership is a new theory which is far from complete, it is a good starting point from which to highlight the importance of leadership communication.
2.2 Leadership Development

Leadership development is the central theme in this thesis, although with communication always in focus. There are, however, some limitations as to how much communication scholars have contributed to theories of leadership development, as forwarded by Martin (2017) and Schneider et al. (2015). They called for more systematic involvement from communication scholars regarding leadership development.

While leadership development is a priority for organisations, the effectiveness of it has been put into question. In a large scale literature review, Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) concluded that there is ‘overwhelming evidence’ to support that training is beneficial for individuals, teams, organisations and even society (p. 467). Meanwhile, there is a wide spread belief among HR leaders that their organisations’ developmental practices are not working (Day & Dragoni, 2015). There are studies which suggest that training is beneficial for organisations but not always for the individual (Ford, Baldwin, & Prasad, 2018). In a comprehensive literature review by Lacerenza et al. (2017), the findings indicate that leadership trainings in general are more effective than previously thought but that there are several conditions which moderate that effectiveness. The training design, delivery and implementation all affect the effectiveness of the training.

Lacerenza et al. (2017) used the typology of Kirkpatrick (1979) as a starting point and evaluated the leadership training on the four criteria: reaction (i.e., attitudinal changes), learning (new knowledge and skill), behaviour (transfer of knowledge into action) and results (mainly organisational effects, often contrasted with cost). Three of the four criteria are directly related to the individual learner (excluding results). However, Kirkpatrick (1979) advocated that learning should be evaluated by tests and is, therefore, not further explored in this thesis, as leadership communication is arguably more complex than what can be measured by pen and paper only. The two remaining aspects of the typology, reaction and behaviour, will be the continued point of focus.

When discussing reactions, an antecedent concept is learner readiness (Avolio & Hannah, 2008). Readiness can be considered a prerequisite for change and can be achieved by personal conviction for the necessity of change as well as by an organisational context which is ready for change (Kohler, 2016). Avolio and Hannah also suggest that individual attitudes and organisational contexts should be examined both before and after any change effort (2008). Developmental readiness allows training participants to make meaning of the lessons as well as to reflect on them and on themselves.
Furthermore, there is an inherent connection between a developmentally ready organisation and individual, as they influence each other towards readiness. Before training, communication may play an important role to increase individual and organisational readiness (Broucker, 2015).

In terms of behavioural outcome, this is often referred to as training transfer (Ford et al., 2018; Vandergoot et al., 2020). Transfer occurs in two ways: generalisation which allows the participant to use skills, knowledge and behaviour learnt in the classroom in other arenas; and maintenance (sometimes retention) which is how well the knowledge persists over time. Taking transfer into account gives opportunities to maximise the effectiveness of training (Ford et al., 2018). Individual factors that affect the ability to generalise include cognitive ability, motivation, work climate, support and work constraints (Blume et al., 2010). The importance of pre-training communication is often not fully acknowledged (Broucker, 2015), but could help facilitate several of the aforementioned factors such as motivation and support. Furthermore, the developmental readiness of the organisation directly affects work climate and constraints. The support of both peers and superiors is an important factor, but supervisor support has a higher impact on generalisation (Ford et al., 2018).

In addition to impacting training design, training transfer may also be used to measure training outcomes. There have been inconsistent results when doing so in the past, but Vandergoot et al. (2020) have suggested that viewing it as two separate processes (generalisation and retention/decay) may solve that issue. These authors also highlight the need for more applied research in this vein.

### 2.2.1 Methods in developing leadership

The methodology of leadership development has great impact on the effectiveness of the training (Lacerenza et al., 2017). Walker (2018), who looked at training for global leadership, proposed a model which suggested that it is the interplay between different approaches that allows for self-efficient learners. Similarly, Lacerenza et al. (2017) found in their meta-study that multiple methods of training used simultaneously was the most effective approach. However, practice was singled out as the single most effective method for learning and it had the strongest effect when combined with any of the other delivery methods. Other factors identified by Lacerenza et al. (2017) as important were:

- Basing the training on a needs analysis
- Feedback
• Spaced training sessions and training length (longer trainings led to higher individual and organisational outcomes)
• Training on site
• Face-to-face delivery (teacher led, not self-administered)

Additionally, they found that attendance policy influenced the training outcome; namely, that optional attendance resulted in higher individual effect but lower organisational effect and vice versa (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Training content also matters. Training which focuses on hard skills (such as budgeting) is more effective, which suggests that those skills may be easier to teach than soft skills. On the other hand, training in soft skills (such as intrapersonal competencies) improves both organisational and subordinate outcomes more than does training in hard skills. As such, training in soft skills has the strongest impact on organisational and subordinate results (Lacerenza et al., 2017).

Lastly, the trainer also impacts the effectiveness of training. According to Kalinoski et al. (2013), a trainer from within the organisation increases participant motivation. This may be a result of a perceived higher organisational commitment to the training when internal resources are used. However, there is also evidence suggesting that external trainers are more effective, while Lacerenza et al. (2017) suggested that they are likely equally effective. On the other hand, self-administered training (i.e., no trainer), is less effective than both as it signals less organisational commitment which leads to less motivation to participate in the training (Blume et al., 2010; Lacerenza et al., 2017).

It should also be noted that while Lacerenza et al. (2017) recommended on-site training, which they found to be more effective, they also highlighted the need for more research regarding on-site training to help explain the underlying functions. They indicated that future research should also aim to provide primary data on participant reactions.

2.2.2 Adult learning in leadership development

As shown in section 2.2.1, methodology matters in leadership development. As such, I suggest lessons from adult learning be taken and considered in an organisational context.

Andragogy as first proposed by Kapp in the 19th century (Loeng, 2017) and popularised by Knowles in the 1970s and 1980s is a central theory of adult learning. On occasion, andragogy and adult learning are incorrectly used as synonyms, because there are a multitude of other adult learning theories, such as How People Learn (HPL; Baporikar, 2017; National Research Council, 2000).
However, the andragogy concept presented by Knowles is, according to Harper and Ross (2011, p. 161), ‘perhaps the best-known conceptualisation of how and why adults learn’.

Andragogy has typically been used in a scholastic context rather than in business organisations. An example of a study which used andragogy for leadership instruction in a college setting is that of McCauley, Hammer and Hinojosa (2017). Like other organisations, the college classroom has to consider the varied background of the group of learners. Although the college classroom differs greatly from the traditional organisational training setting, it’s similarly true that andragogical approaches don’t exclude the use of traditional classroom techniques. Rather, ‘an andragogical approach supplements and enhances teaching techniques by drawing from students’ experiences and helping them make connections from course material to the work environment’ (McCauley et al., 2017, p. 2). Another example of the use of andragogy in the area of leadership training is Brown (2006), who proposed a concept of transformative andragogy. Defined as the process to help others learn, transformative andragogy once again puts the teacher in a more central position than traditional andragogy which is learner-centred.

In andragogy, four central principles are suggested (Knowles, 2015):

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to and impact on their job or personal life.
- Adult learning is problem centred rather than content oriented.

Knowles also proposed six assumptions about the learner: a solid self-concept; experiences upon which to build; a desire and readiness to learn; task and problem-centred orientation to learning; motivation to learn based on internal processes; and a need to know what, why and how they will learn (Knowles, 1980, 1984; McCauley et al., 2017).

When contrasting the early andragogic approach of Kapp with Knowles’ more modern version, I find that: learning through dialogue, using past experiences to gain new knowledge, introspection and reflectivity, real-life application and learner preparedness/readiness are common and complementary principles (Knowles, 1980; Loeng, 2017). Additionally, Knowles underlines the importance to consider each learner’s uniqueness and specific context (Knowles, 2015).
Experience-driven development is also a part of adult learning theory in its own right (Hezlett, 2016). According to experience-driven development, learning occurs when doing assignments, projects, tasks or jobs. Multiple components of andragogy and experience-driven development overlap, such as dialogue/feedback, reflection, readiness and learning from experience (Hezlett, 2016; Knowles, 2015). However, while experience-driven development puts an emphasis on work-related experience, andragogy puts the emphasis on life experience. Put together, experiences from work and life should be considered.

2.3 The Role of Communication Professionals

The role of the communication professional is the focus of the second paper. As such, I’ve looked at how this role was earlier theorised and how the role evolved. I’ve also looked at the specific role of the trainer within a development effort.

Traditionally, the role of communication professional has been viewed through the dichotomy of manager–technician (Broom & Dozier, 1986), which is a modification of the originally proposed five-role typology (Broom & Smith, 1979). However, while often perceived as a dichotomy, Broom and Dozier (1986) actually proposed that the two types likely co-exist and are not mutually exclusive. The manager part of the typology handles tasks related to strategy, while the technician is more hands on and is mainly focused on production. While the manager–technician division seems unable to describe the complexity of the role of communication professionals, there are indications that the division is still accurate in practice in terms of career, salary and job satisfaction (Beurer-Züllig, Fieseler, & Meckel, 2009). Beurer-Züllig et al. found a significant difference in those factors depending on how the role was categorised according to their five-role typology in which two were deemed to belong to the ‘manager’ side and three to the ‘technician’. As such, while the typology division tends to be dichotomous in nature, there are real-life impacts on the professional life.

Another point of academic interest has been to find and suggest new aspects of the professional role, such as coaching (Fieseler, Lutz, & Meckel, 2015), advisory (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015) and managers of intangible resources (Dodd, 2016). Researcher interest in the evolving role of communication professionals has lately increased (Fieseler et al., 2015). Changing organisational climate and globalisation are likely factors behind this increased interest. Other changes, such as the rise of a ‘sharing economy’, motivate a change in role in which the communication professional should act
as a facilitator with strategic responsibilities (Gregory & Halff, 2017). This new organisational reality requires all members of an organisation to be trained, motivated, and enabled to communicate. Here, the communication professional has the possibility to move from a technical role to one that manages and supports communicative processes throughout the organisation (Gregory & Halff, 2017). Similarly, Heide and Simonsson (2011) proposed a holistic approach in which communication professionals help in analysing and developing all processes and actors.

Defining the content of the professional role is important in order to be able to visualise the contribution while also safeguarding the role so it doesn’t move too far away from its core competence (Falkheimer et al., 2017). When following up on the outcome of the work, the communication department regularly fails to consider internal services (such as training and coaching) (Buhmann et al., 2018). As such, the overall contribution (or possibly, lack thereof) of the communication department to organisational success is difficult to measure. Clearer roles in which process ownership is included would help in follow-up. Unclear role descriptions and missing key performance indicators have also led to communication professionals feeling less appreciated by top management (Tench et al., 2017).

2.3.1 An educational role
Managers have complex roles as communicators within which they are expected to manage their teams as well as act as external representatives through public appearances (Fieseler et al., 2015). Middle management, in particular, has important roles as managers and are expected to enable sensemaking, provide information, interpret and adapt information and provide feedback to superiors and employees alike (Heide et al., 2018).

Mishra et al. (2014) suggested that communication professionals have an opportunity to act as coaches and trainers for front-line managers. They can help the managers to build self-confidence about their communication and enable them to become more comfortable with face-to-face communication. Fieseler et al. (2015) wrote that managers at all levels require coaching and training in order to handle public appearances as well as their teams.

Additionally, the relationships between supervisors and employees can be beneficial when communicating values and goals (Karanges et al., 2015). As such, it is imperative that managers are confident in their ability to plan for and execute communication.
3 Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodology to collect data for this thesis. Notably, the thesis is written within a project and, as such, I first describe the project. After that, I describe the data collection. Under heading 3.3, I then explain and reflect on the data that I chose to use as a basis for my three papers. Lastly, I include some reflections about science philosophy, ethics and scientific outreach.

3.1 The Project Behind the Thesis

‘Communicative leadership development—analysing value creation in two business organisations’ was a three-year project which started in 2017 and was funded by the Swedish Knowledge Foundation. The project was the second in a series of projects at DEMICOM research centre which focused on leadership communication. The first project, ‘Communicative Leadership: Conceptualisation, analysis and development’ was done in cooperation with seven business organisations, including the two who participated in the current project.

Learning from the first project allowed the corporate partners to develop their communicative leadership, and the two corporations that participated in the current project both built their training programmes on that knowledge.

The research group of the current project consisted of three researchers from media and communication in Sundsvall (myself included), two researchers from quality management in Östersund and senior professional communicators from the two participating corporations.

3.2 Research Design

The research design was guided by the purpose of the thesis, which is to further the theoretical understanding of communicative leadership development, specifically in the form of training efforts. Consequently, communicative leadership trainings were the focus of the data collection. As the goal is to provide new understanding to practitioners who are working with developing communicative organisations and communicative leaders, I chose a qualitative approach.

The qualitative approach has its roots in science philosophies such as social constructivism and phenomenology (Patton, 2015). The ultimate aim of a qualitative approach is to get an holistic, in-depth and contextually-dependent understanding of a phenomena, in this case, leadership training.
The study of leadership has historically been rooted in a positivistic and quantitative paradigm (Klenke, 2016). However, this approach has failed to provide an understanding of the deeper structures of leadership. Qualitative research, on the other hand, has the ability to provide more in-depth understanding. As long as it adheres to the same concern for quality and rigour as quantitative approaches, it might be able to provide more explanatory functions which are more helpful in the end. As Klenke (2016) wrote, ‘qualitative research has the potential to restore respect for ontological integrity and the capacity to replace esoterica with relevance’ (p. 5).

Mixed-method research is closely related to pragmatism, but it may be problematic depending on the school of pragmatism to which one subscribes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015). This problem is grounded in the different epistemological understandings of quantitative and qualitative research.

While I am in favour of mixed-method research, for the purpose of this thesis, which is to increase understanding of a phenomenon, I believe that a qualitative approach is indicated. Using the most appropriate method for a specific study, while appreciating the benefits of diverse approaches, is fully in line with the pragmatist approach (Creswell & Poth, 2017). If the research is continued in the future, a mixed-method approach would be chosen to complement the qualitative approach selected here.

Notably, the co-worker perspective is not prominent in the collected data. Only through reports from the interviewed managers and in the observations of the managers are the co-worker experiences examined. Being part of a larger project provides excellent access to organisations and data, but also guides the data collection. In this case, it regrettably led to the co-worker perspective not being as central as I would have liked it to be.

3.2.1 Data collection

The first paper included in this thesis is a literature study. It’s based on a literature review which was done at the beginning of the project. The second article is based on 17 interviews with trainers (7) and leaders (10) from the two organisations. The third article is based on 23 interviews with leaders from one of the organisations. The main method which supports this thesis is interviews. The purpose of this will be discussed more below. In addition, observations and content analysis have furthered the understanding of the trainings and the organisational context.

The literature review was done in two stages. In the first stage, the search period was limited to 2016–2017. The reason was to update the group
knowledge on what had happened since the research application was made (and the literature review that entailed). In the second stage, the search period was extended to the last 10 years (2008–2018). The same search words were used, but in the second search, they were more precise by use of limiters (such as quotation marks).

Two methods were employed to increase understanding although they did not provide empirical data that was used in the papers. First, all training materials from the two participating organisations were read through multiple times by the author. The materials consisted of manuals for the trainers, invitations to the trainings, handouts, power-points, schedules and so on. This reading was done to create a deeper understanding of the trainings. Documentation is used in a variety of approaches but is rarely used as a main source (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This is also true for this thesis, as the content analysis provided a foundation for the trainer interviews as well as for case descriptions of the two organisations’ trainings but was not used as a primary source.

Second, observations of the trainings were also made. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the trainings and allowed the thesis author to understand the responses and explanations of the interviewees in the post-training interviews. Additionally, the author did ‘shadowing’ observations in which managers were followed during the work day. This was done before the managers had taken the training. The intention was to repeat the shadowing six months after the training in order to compare the communicative behaviour before and after the training. Unfortunately, outside circumstances, such as a strike at the site, hindered the follow-up to be done as planned. As observations are difficult to do because of the need to prioritise to what attention should be paid (Creswell & Poth, 2017), an observation guide was used as a support. Furthermore, manual notes were made during the shadowing and the training observations.

The primary method for collecting empirical data was interviews. All interviews were conducted by the project team members using a semi-structured interview manual. Semi-structured interviews are a method which allows the researcher to study the interviewees’ perceptions; this method is considered to be both purposeful and descriptive (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are based on a thematic interview protocol with mainly open-ended questions which allow the interviewer to rephrase questions and pose follow up questions (Klenke, 2016).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The interviews were done in four languages: Swedish, English, Dutch and Brazilian Portuguese.
The Dutch and the Brazilian Portuguese interviews were then translated into English. Analysis of the interviews was thus done in both English and Swedish.

The trainer interviews which are part of the empirical data for paper 2 were done with trainers from both organisations. The trainers were interviewed by the author via Skype or telephone at the beginning of the project. At this time, the training material was also made available. Five of the trainers were interviewed again face-to-face in tandem with observations of the trainings. Additionally, interviews with managers participating in the trainings were included in papers 2 and 3.

Data collection was thus made in several different countries, which means that the results to some degree will be affected by cultural differences. The organisational culture is very strong, and in visiting the sites in different parts of the world, it became clear that organisational culture took precedence over local culture. Still, this is a factor that has been considered in the papers and the data analysis.

### 3.3 Selecting Empirical Material

According to Creswell and Poth (2017), there are three considerations in a sampling strategy. First, who should be part of the study and what area should be studied. Second, what kind of selection strategy should be used. And third, how large should the sample be.

The first consideration was partly made as a result of involvement in a project. Two organisations who were about to implement communicative leadership developments were part of the project group and made their organisations available for the research group. However, I still had the opportunity to do my own selections for the extent of the thesis. The first paper is theoretical, the second paper looks at both organisations, and the third looks only at one of the organisations. I chose this approach as I wanted to be able to study the one case in more depth in the third paper. If I had included both organisations, the methodology would have been more difficult to evaluate as the training programmes differed. The organisation chosen had a more homogenous implementation strategy in which the trainings at all sites were done face-to-face. As such, I had a wider selection of interview material for making a fair comparison.

Second, a purposeful selection was made of the interviewees. There was also a strategic choice to do interviews and observations at five different sites for one of the organisations. The other organisation offered the trainings more
‘on demand’ and there was less possibility to do a wide selection. Instead, a selection based on availability was made in that organisation.

Third, I had the benefit of selecting from a large amount of data. Motivated by the purpose of the thesis, I chose to use mainly interviews. Other data, such as surveys, was also available. However, as the thesis did not aim to allow generalisation, I decided that such quantitative data (which was unfortunately limited) would not increase understanding. While a study using observations to a greater extent as primary data would have been interesting, due to practical limitations (language, among other things), the observations were divided within the research group. Consequently, I chose to not base a paper on the observations as I consider note-taking to be supportive of personal observations and not the equivalent of it.

Interviews always have inherent traces of power structures between the interviewee and the interviewer (Klenke, 2016). This method of conducting interviews also always includes some aspect of ongoing analysis while collecting data. In this respect, asking the interviewees to reflect on past events encourages them to analyse themselves and their experiences. Consequently, interviews will impact the interviewee and make them part of the research process. To quote Brinkman (2018), ‘semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogue’ (p. 579). In the context of evaluating leadership trainings, I therefore did not disregard that the interviews themselves may have been points of learning, through reflection, for the training participants.

3.4 My Philosophical Starting Point

I consider myself to be a pragmatist. This is a reflective and adaptive philosophical world view which focuses on what is in reality useful (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the following sub-section, I discuss the different approaches (or discourses) regarding the study of leadership in organisational communication. I then discuss pragmatism in the field. I suggest that the dialogical discourse (discussed below) could be considered to be an example as well of pragmatism within the field.

3.4.1 Relational leadership and practice theory

There are different ways to approach the study of leadership within organisational communication. Deetz (2001) called them discourses, as they influence the way in which we are able to discuss leadership. But they also affect the way we choose theoretical grounding, our methodology and our
view on the relationship between theory and practice. According to Jian and Fairhurst (2016), there are four major discourses: normative, critical, interpretive and dialogical.

The dialogical view of leadership believes that leadership is in its nature not only created in dialogue but in the relational aspects of interpersonal communication. Relative to interpretive and dialogical approaches, the dialogical approach has a stronger focus on practice. Normative discourse primarily wants to build leadership theories that both explain and predict (and control) leadership practice; the critical leadership discourse primarily aims for social and organisational change; the interpretive discourse prioritises practice and emphasises the uniqueness of each context and practice; and the dialogical discourse aims to mitigate the dualistic/hierarchal bias of theory or practice by adopting a reflexive approach. ‘In this way, leadership theory and practice provide a source of growth for each other’ (Jian & Fairhurst, 2016, p. 15). Furthermore, one can only understand the leadership process as ‘it is actually lived and practiced’, in essence through the conversations of various leadership actors (p. 16). Jian and Fairhurst also wrote that there is an ‘inherent’ moral component to the study of leadership conversations. However, while there may be a moral ideal, I am hesitant to agree to the innateness of morality, as that must lay in the eye of the beholder and hands of the researcher.

3.4.2 Pragmatism in organisational communication

Pragmatism has been present in the field of communication for a long time, but it is just in recent years that it has begun to be discussed as a more clearly stated approach in the field (Bergman, 2012). Still, it’s debated whether or not pragmatism can be viewed as a separate philosophical approach with its own ideas and tools instead of being used as a complement to other approaches. Like the dialogical discourse, pragmatism is focused on what is in reality useful, and theory and practice are strongly bound together.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) suggested the concept of discursive pragmatism as a way to approach the consequences of the linguistic turn in organisational research. They wrote that this pragmatic approach to discourse is a way to be ‘discourse-near but not discourse-exclusive’ (p. 136). By this, they meant that by too strictly applying the linguistic turn and postmodernism, it becomes impossible to say anything about the organisation because we are demanding too much of language. By taking a step back and approaching the capacity of language in a less myopic way, the researcher is able to step beyond language as constructive or functional. Discursive
pragmatism allows us to view how language at the one level indicates issues at other levels. As an example, organisational taboos may be indicated by organisational members’ unwillingness to discuss a specific subject. By acknowledging the multitude of possible meanings and accepting that social reality is rich, we may also accept our inability to completely describe a phenomena (Kärreman, 2014). ‘From this perspective, it makes more sense to attempt to capture this richness rather than make questionable claims of completeness and/or exhaustiveness’ (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 147). Furthermore, claims about practice, meaning and talk require different kinds of evidence, and by considering that, it is possible to pose and defend claims about the interrelatedness of those levels.

3.5 Research Ethics

I will shortly reflect about axiology, or research ethics, which is an important subject for all research, including organisational studies. Meisenbach (2017) proposed that axiology should be considered in organisational communication research in the same way as are ontology and epistemology. She wrote: ‘[…] ethical assumptions are inherently tied into human communication and organizing’ (2017, p. 147, my emphasis). There are some important reflections to make when engaging in research about organisational communication, such as fair representation of the respondents and fair depiction of the context. Another point to consider is that there is always the strong possibility that the organisation has an ‘unfairly strong’ position, as the researcher becomes dependent on the organisation.

As humans, we like to see ourselves as moral persons (Meisenbach, 2017), and we care about our moral self-image (Robbennolt, 2015). We therefore tend to avoid situations that can tempt us to act unethically (ibid). But there are situations in which our cognitive processes can help us justify unethical behaviour, especially if our cognitive resources are depleted through, for instance, stress or lack of sleep (De Cremer & Moore, 2020; Robbennolt, 2015). Furthermore, as our self-image and moral identity may influence our tendency to act immorally, reflection about our self as moral persons may consequently stop us from acting counter to that. Continuous discussions in the research community may also be an effective method to stop unethical behaviour as social motivation to act unethically would be lessened. As such, I argue that discussions about ethics in organisational communication should be lifted to a higher degree.

On a more tangible level, data collection has been made in accordance with recommendations for social researchers not to do harm, for instance, in
regards to interviews (Brinkmann, 2018; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), as well as in accordance with laws about personal information (European Union, 2016/679). Consideration has also been given to the Ethical Review Law (etikprövningslagen), although this thesis does not require ethical review (SFS, 2003:4600, 2018:1999).

3.6 Scientific Outreach

While focus often lies with outreach to others in academia, mainly through conferences and papers, societal outreach is also important. This is often discussed as scientific impact. Deetz and Eger write about ‘engaged scholarship’ which they state is more than outreach and is instead an entirely different philosophy (2014).

There are various ways to measure scientific impact. Often it is considered impact when it affects economics, society, health or rules and legislations (Ravenscroft et al., 2017). One way in which this project could affect society and health (and consequently also the economy) is through the support of improvement in the working environment. The Swedish Work Environment Authority (arbetsmiljöverket) has designated the psychosocial work environment as one of the prioritised areas for improvement (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2018). They conduct continuous surveys, and the change since the last survey in 2015 shows an increase in the group that reported a significantly high psychological strain in their work environment. This highlights a trend of increased work-related stress. As several factors of communicative leadership have been shown to decrease psychological strain on employees (Bäckström et al., 2016), implementation of the concept in more organisations should decrease the overall societal strain.
4 Summary of papers

Short summaries of the appended papers (printed version) are now presented.

4.1 Paper 1: Communication Training for Leaders and Managers—A review of empirical studies (Bergman, Johansson Hamrin, Bäckström, & Ingelsson)

The purpose of this paper is to review literature which presents empirical cases of communication training for managers and leaders. In the review, health related areas were most common and used a mix of delivery methods, such as roleplaying, feedback and coaching.

Improved communication was reported in the programmes (all but one), but how this was measured was often unclear and presumably supported by self-reporting. Design of the programmes was driven by practical needs in the organisations rather than on theoretical foundations. This suggests that pragmatic needs rather than theoretical application are the drivers of leadership communication development.

The results show that endeavours are being made to improve communication in settings where communication has been found lacking, such as hospitals and high-risk work settings. Often they are based on a needs analysis in which a previous lack of formal communication knowledge was highlighted. It’s also clear that the lack of communication researchers involved in these endeavours causes them to be built on shifting theoretical foundations. Therefore, communication researchers should aim for cross-disciplinary explorations of communication development in various settings.

4.2 Paper 2: When communication professionals become trainers: a new role (Bergman, 2020)

Motivated by the implementation of new training roles in the two organisations, the purpose of this paper is to examine how communication professionals enact an educational role aimed at improving organisational communication through communication training. The paper analyses what this implementation means for the role of the communication professionals. The educational and coaching role have previously been suggested by, for instance, Mishra et al. (2014) and Buhmann et al. (2018), but this paper provides a case where this new role has actually been implemented.
Theories about the roles of communication professionals suggest new roles, such as coaching (Fieseler et al., 2015), advisory (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015) and managing intangible resources (Dodd, 2016). Defining the role of communication professionals helps visualise the contributions that the profession is making within the organisation (Falkheimer et al., 2017). An holistic role for communication professionals includes analysing and supporting all communication processes and actors (Heide & Simonsson, 2011).

Bases on 17 interviews (around 240 pages of transcribed data), the findings show that by taking on the role of communication trainers, the communication professionals are acting as advocates for their departments by leading the trainings. Additionally, the vocabulary used to discuss communication is adopted in the organisations’ discourse. As for the managers, they report that they felt better equipped to handle their daily communication. The trainings also gave the managers structured knowledge about communication, which enabled them to use tools and frameworks which were introduced in the trainings.

Finally, the trainings allowed the managers to cascade the messages from upper managers with more confidence, as suggested by Karanges et al. (2015) to enhance the effect of the communication of values and goals.

4.3 Paper 3: Lessons from adult learning—An interview study of communicative leadership development (Bergman)

While leadership development is a massive industry which costs organisations large amounts of money (Westfall, 2019), the effectiveness of training leaders has been brought into question (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Lacerenza et al., 2017). There is, however, evidence that suggests that trainings are beneficial for organisations in general, but there is less research as to the benefits on an individual level (Ford et al., 2018).

The purpose of this paper is to present and analyse a communicative leadership development programme using a framework of adult learning, as it is within the context of adult learning that leadership development happens (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2008).

The analysis of the interview data suggests that using a framework of adult learning to structure trainings can be a way to make them more effective. However, as adult learning theories focus on the learning of the individual, they fail to take into account the benefits from an experience exchange which
is possible within an organisation. As such, the theory could benefit from an adaptation which includes not only learning from an individual’s own experience, but from the shared group experience; in essence: organisational learning.
5 Findings

In this section, some of the main findings from the papers will be presented and analysed. For a more in-depth description, please read the appended papers (printed version).

5.1 Approaches to Communicative Leadership Development

The empirical studies which were included in the literature review suggest that the design of leadership training programmes is generally driven by a practical need rather than by theory. Improved communication was often reported as a change after the trainings even if it was not an explicit goal beforehand. In one of the cases, communication was mentioned as being ‘at the heart’ of the training (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). However, in the reported content of the training as well as in the results, communication was not mentioned. Put together, the findings indicate that communication may still be viewed as a biproduct rather than a key process of leadership by the researchers in the studied literature, all of whom belong to fields other than communication studies. The need for improved communication, especially in high-risk environments such as building sites and healthcare centres, is, however, well understood. Even so, theories of communication are not utilised in the design of trainings. The underlying reasons behind this may be that the trainings aren’t designed by the communication departments (even though they are aimed at improving communication). However, due to the way the papers are written, it is difficult to judge who ‘owned’ the trainings within the organisations, and further study would be required.

The methodological design of the empirical studies showed that surveys were the single most used method, although a mixed method approach was more common. Focus groups and interviews were used as a qualitative approach, although one of the surveys also used observations. The number of surveys used in many of the studies was small, with 15 as the lowest number of survey responses and 385 as the highest.

Training methodology was generally mixed, with a wide variety of methods used, including role playing, discussions, workshops, coaching and more. The use of several delivery methods is supported by previous research (see, for instance, Day et al., 2014; Lacerenza et al., 2017) and does also seem to be effective in the cases examined in the literature review.
5.2 The New Role of Communication Professionals

Using communication professionals as internal trainers had several outcomes. First, it was dependent on and led to greater internal collaboration. Typically, there tends to be some amount of friction between internal services, such as the communication department and HR, as it is unclear who owns the subject of developing internal communication (Mishra et al., 2014). In the examined case, the support of HR in creating and marketing the training programme was, according to the interviewees, essential. Furthermore, they concluded that after this experience, the collaboration between the two departments went smoother and was more fruitful than before.

An additional important factor was that the communication professionals had insights into the organisations and were able to encourage upper management to take the trainings themselves as well as to pass on and show their support for the trainings. This encouraged upper management to function as spokespeople for the training. The managers who participated in the training also reflected on how the buy-in from upper management was an important selling point for them about the importance of the programme.

For upper management, using the communication professionals as trainers was a matter of being cost effective. For the communication professionals, however, this role as trainers was new and they considered it as a way to grow in their profession. In one of the organisations, the role as communication trainer was established as a new title at several sites and the trainers there could focus exclusively on the trainings.

Using the communication professionals as trainers made them much more visible in the organisations. While this increased contact from managers seeking support, it also meant that the communication department was contacted at an earlier stage. Additionally, the role of the communication professionals and department became clearer for other functions and managers in the organisation, as well as for the professionals themselves. The directives became clearer that they were expected to go beyond production and into strategic and supportive work. Finally, the role of communication in general became clearer within the organisation and encouraged a culture in which communication was always considered.

5.3 Participant Experience of Communicative Leadership Trainings

The participants discussed several benefits from the training. First, they reported that they were able to retroactively identify problems that they had
experienced earlier in their leadership role as being caused by a lack of clear and purposeful communication. Notably, the leaders reflected on how they had neglected the meaning making and explanatory role they had. One of the managers explained it like this: ‘While I was already at “how”, they were still at “why”’. This insight led to the next outcome of the training which was that the leaders started planning their communication more. In addition, as the trainers were part of the organisation (they were chosen internally), they were able to encourage this method of planning in the daily work of the organisations. For instance, by highlighting that a communication plan was missing during a project meeting.

Getting to know the team with which they were communicating was also forwarded by the leaders as an important outcome, especially those who were leading their team virtually. Connected to this, adaptation of the message to the group and their level was also a change that the managers talked about after the trainings.

Lastly, after the trainings the leaders noted how they had gained a more structured understanding of communication. This gave them the tools and language needed not only to discuss their challenges with other leaders but also to internally reflect on their communication. Without prompting, several of the leaders noted that, after the training, they felt calmer and more secure about their own communication. This was the case for those who reported that they worked similarly to how they worked before as well as for those who reported significant changes.

5.4 Adult Learning in Communicative Leadership Development

The first point of the theory of adult learning, known as andragogy, is that adults should be involved in the planning of their training (Knowles, 2015). In the examined case, the training was designed based on the employee survey as well as interviews with leaders in the organisation. Individual leaders were not part of the planning. What was noticeable in the interviews, however, was that the participants who had high expectations going into the training (which was built by pre-training communication) were also more positive towards the training afterwards. They tended towards being optimistic about further trainings in communication and reported that they had changed their behaviour in their daily work.

Another point which is important in adult learning is that of learning from experience (see, for instance, Hezlett, 2016). The interviewees reported that introspection (reflection on themselves and their experiences) as well as open
dialogue about the other participant experiences was the greatest take-away from the trainings.

Third, work and life impact of lessons is also highlighted in adult learning theory. This was also present in the examined case, which is a way to ensure that the training effectiveness is increased through generalisation (Blume et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2018). Some of the interviewees mentioned using lessons from the trainings when communicating with their families. This suggests that they have been able to generalise the knowledge gained.

After the training, the leaders reflected on the need to plan their communication as well as ensure understanding. This is in line with Fairhurst and Connaughton’s suggestion that leadership communication is both about transmission of messages and about meaning (2014a).
6 Discussion

In the literature review, one of the findings was that the programmes reported improved communication to a high degree. This was, however, mostly based on reported self-experienced improvement. Consequently, reports of improved communication can be viewed as a good result in itself when communication is either easily taught or the design of the various programmes is well thought through. It could also be viewed as a consequence of communication being seen as an intangible process which is difficult to measure, as Zerfass and Volk (2018) claimed. As none of the studies was authored by communication researchers, it is quite possible that communication was viewed as a diffuse concept. As such, communicative development efforts can benefit from the involvement of communication scholars, much like Martin (2017) and Schneider et al. (2015) suggested.

The study examined what happened within the organisation and for the individuals when a new role was implemented for the communication professionals in the two organisations. The professionals themselves saw this as an opportunity to grow, and, furthermore, the role of communication and the communication professionals became clearer after the training. As such, having the communication professionals act as communication trainers seemed to solve some of the issues for the profession that have been forwarded by previous research, such as visibility in the organisation, increased organisational understanding of the role and clarification of the role for themselves (see, for instance, Buhmann et al., 2018; Falkheimer et al., 2017; Simcic Brønn, 2014).

Additionally, it has been suggested that communication training can help support leaders in their roles (Hamrin, 2016b) and that the role of coach/trainer can be assumed by communication professionals (Zerfass & Volk, 2018), both of which were the case in the two organisations examined. One clear benefit of using the communication professionals as trainers is that they stay in the organisations after the trainings, unlike outside trainers would have. As such, they are able to provide additional support after the training. While Lacerenza et al. (2017) found in their meta-study that internal and external trainers might be as effective, this may be dependent on the subject of the training. The continued support and coaching which have been forwarded as a future orientation of the communication profession, and the reflections of the training participants, suggest that there is added benefit from utilising internal trainers when developing communicative leadership
through training. Additionally, internal trainers are more aware of the context in which the leaders act than are outside trainers, adding additional insights into the communicative needs of the organisation.

By using a framework of adult learning to analyse the training as experienced by the participants, I found that there are several overlaps with adult learning theory and leadership training in organisations. There are, however, also differences which leave room for improvement. The suggested model of communicative leadership development, presented below, attempts to take the lessons learnt from this analysis and put it into a model which can help practitioners design training. It may also provide a lens through which the subject can be further studied.

6.1 Building on the Papers: a Model of Communicative Leadership Development

Building on the findings of the three papers, paper 3 in particular, and on theories of adult learning and andragogy, the following model is suggested as a basis for communicative leadership trainings.

1. **Internal trainer:** If possible, having an internal trainer shows great subject commitment from management and has other benefits.
2. **Preparedness:** Participants need to be prepared to participate in the training.
3. **Experience exchange:** Experience of the individuals and the group is the basis for learning activities.
4. **Real-life impact:** Immediate real-life relevance is important and should be highlighted during the training.
5. **Problem centred:** The participants should identify and work on their own communicative challenges/problems.
6. **Method multiplicity:** A variety of training methods should be utilised, with emphasis on practice.
7. **Evaluate:** Participants should be involved in evaluation of the training.

The first point, internal trainer, is motivated by internal trainers signalling greater support and commitment to the subject by upper management (Lacerenza et al., 2017). It also has other benefits, such as that the trainer is more familiar with the organisational context and that the trainer becomes visible in the organisation and can in effect be supportive to leaders who experience communicative challenges well after the training has finished.

Second, preparedness, is an adaptation of the andragogy suggested as ‘involved in planning and evaluation’. In the organisational setting, especially
in large scale implementation, it is not practical to have all participants be part of the planning process. Instead, the trainers and upper management should work to create buy-in for the training by explaining the motivation behind implementation of the training. Participants who are open to learning and motivated to participate are more likely to report that they have learned something and that they have changed their behaviour.

Third, adult learning is centred around learning from experience. In the organisational settings, there is the added advantage of learning from other participant experiences as well. An open exchange of experience will allow participants to learn from the situations and mistakes (and successes) of others, while also facilitating introspective reflections on their own experience.

Fourth, the real-life impact of the training lessons should always be highlighted. This can be accomplished by, for instance, using multiple examples and making sure that the second point (preparedness) has readied the participants and explained the benefits of the knowledge to be gained. For training that lasts over a longer period of time (i.e., more than a one-time event), between training tasks also highlight the real-life impact of lessons.

Fifth, the ability to retrospectively identify issues as being caused by unsuccessful communication was highlighted by training participants as a key takeaway. While adult learning is distinctly problem centred, the importance of communication is not always apparent to leaders. By focusing on a project’s communicative side and making a communication plan (regardless of subject, for instance, ‘changing recycling system’), participants are able to solve a problem that they previously may not have been able to identify.

Sixth, leadership trainings should utilise a variety of methods and not rely solely on lectures. Discussions and the creation of project plans for future communication are examples of other methods that put experience and problem-solving at the centre.

Lastly, evaluation should take place after a period of time has passed. Immediate surveys may provide feedback but meeting with the training group and discussing experiences that have occurred since the training (including presenting the outcome and lessons learned from the communicative project) proliferates the training. This means that the evaluation is part of the learning process and not just a way for management and the trainers to receive immediate feedback.

These seven points together form a model of communicative leadership training which is based on the findings from the three papers included in this thesis. The model should be tested in various settings and may need to be
modified. However, it utilises knowledge from adult learning theory, leadership development and the practical large-scale implementation of communicative leadership training in two organisations.

6.2 Thesis Contribution
The thesis contributes by expanding on existing theories of communicative leadership. In the appended papers (printed version), the current state of research about the development of communicative leaders is presented. The implications for the role of communication professionals and the communication department is also explained. Furthermore, theories of adult learning are put in relation to communicative leadership training as an evaluative framework.

In summary, the three papers provide a basis for the suggested model of communicative leadership development which may be used by practitioners and researchers alike to further the understanding of communicative leadership development.

6.3 Practical Implications
The communicative leadership development model can guide organisations and practitioners who wish to implement a leadership communication programme. They may use the seven points as step points which are based on both theoretical and empirical knowledge.

Furthermore, the role of communication professionals as communication trainers is a reasonable evolution of the profession. Organisations need to adapt to modern demands of excellent communication throughout the organisation and in relation to the outside stakeholders.
7 Conclusions and Future Research

The purpose of this thesis has been to further the theoretical understanding of communicative leadership development, specifically in the form of training efforts. The goal was also to provide new understanding to practitioners who are working with the development of communicative leadership.

This has been accomplished by looking at current research about the development of leadership communication. The thesis studied two multinational organisations who implemented large scale training programmes. With a qualitative design, the thesis attempts to reach a deep understanding of the new role of communication professionals as communication trainers which the two organisations have undertaken. It also describes how the participating leaders reflect about communication after the trainings. Lastly, a framework of adult learning was used to analyse the trainings at one of the organisations which led to the suggested model of communicative leadership development.

There are two main avenues for continued research. First, the suggested model of communicative leadership development needs to be tested. This should be done in different contexts and preferably with a mixed methods approach to allow for deep understanding as well as greater generalisation of results.

Second, the co-workers in the organisations have not been the focus of this thesis but are an important venue for further research. Influence stemming from the communicative leadership training on co-workers is, of course, one of the main outcomes of the training. Co-workers should thus be put in the centre of future research. Moreover, trainings which include the co-workers as well as the leaders may provide a higher impact than do trainings aimed at only the leaders (Larsson, 2016). Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) also raised the possibility of knowledge cascading through the organisational levels as a result of training, although they called for more research in that area. Given that leadership communication is a relational process, this is a promising area for future research.

Additionally, the long-term effects of communicative leadership development should also be examined. Communication training is mainly intended to reduce stress and uncertainty for leaders, and this was also reported by the participants. However, at the same time, it puts more demand on the leaders to be able to communicate more and better, to cascade messages, to be more supportive of their employees, etc. This increased demand may have detrimental effects in the long run. The effects may possibly be positive
instead and help managers better handle demands that would have been raised regardless of the training. Clearly, this is something that needs to be examined further.
8 References


European Union, Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free


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