

# WHEN LEADERSHIP GOES BRAND

TURNING LEADERSHIP INTO A COMPANY CAPABILITY BY BRIDGING  
CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS WITH EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR



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*“Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable.”*

John Wooden

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Written by

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# ABSTRACT

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Most of today's literature on leadership is concerned with the competences or characteristics of a leader, which has resulted in countless suggestions of competence development models. The authors Ulrich and Smallwood have suggested a new approach called leadership brand, which attempts to bridge customer expectations and employee behavior through leadership, move the focus from the inside-out to the outside-in by place key customers' and investor's expectations and experiences at the heart of any employee behavior through leadership.

In many, if not most companies, leadership is directly connected to the individual leader, putting the company at risk as the future of the company's leadership capability is intertwined with the future of the individual. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the concept of leadership brand could help companies to develop their leadership into a company capability.

In order to shed more light on the concept of leadership brand and its applicability eight interviews with employees from Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur have been conducted, respectively. Although neither of the case companies consciously works with their leadership brand as defined by Ulrich and Smallwood, small signs of it have been identified.

The analysis and discussion of the interview findings have provided deeper insights into the prevailing leadership cultures at the case companies and identified several weaknesses in their ways of conducting leadership. This has led to the conclusion that the concept of leadership brand is a considerable alternative to Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur's current leadership practice. Focusing on the company's capability to develop competent leaders who are able to deliver on the unique qualities customers and investors care about would enable the companies to develop a strong leadership bench, and thus assure customers' and investors' trust in future performance.

# FOREWORD

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In the beginning of 2014 I found myself presented with what seemed to be an impossible task at the time: writing my master thesis. I did not know where to start, but I did know that I wanted to follow my curiosity regarding two of my favorite topics, namely brands and great leaders. I have always admired people with great personalities and began to wonder what would happen to brands when the great leader whose personality helped defining the brand would leave. Especially the case of Steve Jobs and Apple sparked this interest. My research eventually led me to the concept of leadership brand and I had come to realize that there is much more to great leadership than what great personalities do.

Now, after months of struggles, tears, and personal growth I would like to thank a number of people for the support and encouragement they have granted me. First, I'd like to thank Troels Troelsen for his guidance and inspiration throughout this process. Then, I'd like to thank Rikke Præstmark, Klaus Hovmøller, Marina Mazin, and Kristian Dalhof from Rockwool Scandinavia, as well as Søren Skriver, Brian Tufvesson, Marlene Uttenthal, and Ditte Sorknæs from Kopenhagen Fur for granting me valuable insights into their company's leadership culture. Then, I'd like to thank my friends for the emotional support and positive thoughts throughout this entire process. Next, I'd like to thank my parents for always believing in me and reminding me of what really is important in life. And finally, I'd like to thank Christoffer V. Jensen for a seemingly endless amount of love, encouragement, and nerves of steel.

Thank you!

Copenhagen, February 2015

Tanita Vanessa Tautges

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# INTRODUCTION

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## INTRO AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

For centuries human kind has been fascinated with leaders and their ability to lead. During the past 50 years alone more than 1,000 studies on leaders and leadership have been conducted (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007). Since the 1920's, when the first serious research started, the focus has been on a lot of different approaches, as for example the trait approach from the 1920's, the style approach of the 1940's, and the contingency approach of the 1970's (Goffee & Jones, 2000).

For the past decade scholars have provided the body of literature with countless articles, books, and suggestions on how to be a great leader; what styles to adopt, what theories to follow, what behavior to adapt. The problem with these studies is that most of them focus on the individual leader assuming that great leadership is rooted in a great individual. While there certainly can be learned a lot from observing others, connecting the leadership capability of a company directly to the individual leaders raises some issues. For example, what if the person you are building your leadership on leaves the company? Does that leave the company without leadership? And what if there is no one to fill the empty spot or that person is not as great a leader? Making the leadership capability dependent on individual leaders puts that company at risk as the future of their leadership then is intertwined with the future of the leader.

This project is based on the works of Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood, who published the book 'Leadership Brand: Developing Customer Focused Leaders to Drive Lasting Value" (2007). Here, the authors plead for a shift in the understanding of leadership. Previous studies have underlined that, in order to achieve great leadership, the individual leaders need to be developed and need to improve their personal competences. While Ulrich and Smallwood still acknowledge the individual leader to be important for driving performance, they argue that leadership should be considered the company's capability to develop a strong and capable leadership bench rather than focusing on the individual. The metaphor of brand is meant to help companies take this mental step by moving the view from an inside-out to an outside-in



perspective, in other words, moving the focus towards how the company is perceived by key customers and investors instead of entirely focusing on how the company wants to be perceived. The brand of the company, as underlined by Bates (2012), is the company's reputation of who they are; it is the outside's experiences with and expectations of a company or product. Leadership brand, then, is the company's capability to develop leaders who can deliver on these expectations and experiences (Mirza, 2012).

Ulrich and Smallwood argue that the way leadership is conducted nowadays needs to be updated. It is not enough to focus on individual leaders and their competences. A company's true leadership strength lies in the ability to develop capable leaders who are able to live up to customers' as well as investors' expectations, and thereby secure faith in future performance. Building a company's leadership capability on single individuals puts the company at risk as the future of that company's leadership is intertwined with the individual. The aim of this project is to highlight and evaluate the concept of leadership brand and assess it against the current way of conducting leadership at two world-leading companies, Rockwool Scandinavia and Copenhagen Fur. This project will be guided by the following research question:

***“How could the concept of leadership brand help companies develop their leadership in to a company capability?”***

In order to answer this research question, several sub-questions will be investigated throughout this paper:

- 1) How is the concept of branding understood at the case companies?
- 2) How is leadership understood at the case companies?
- 3) How extensive is the focus on customers?
- 4) Do the case companies show signs of leadership brand and how?

The investigation and evaluation of these sub-questions will provide a more thorough understanding of the research area and allow for deeper insights into the case companies' ways of conducting leadership.

## **SCOPE OF THIS PROJECT AND DELIMITATION**

This project is concerned with shedding more light on the concept of leadership brand and its applicability to businesses. As with any research project, this paper could have gone down many different roads, however, due to time and space restrictions, certain decisions had to be made regarding the extent of this project. Ideally, in order to create a comprehensive analysis of the case companies' leadership culture and the ways in which leadership brand could help improve it, I would have needed to study all leaders in both organizations while on the job. Due to time and resource restrictions the analysis and discussion will be derived from the perspectives of employees in leadership positions, and the information I was provided with by Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur.

Furthermore, this project is about uncovering how the concept of leadership brand can help companies develop their leadership into a company capability; it is not about analyzing the companies' leadership excellence using different and very extensive tools of measuring, but rather about gaining in depth knowledge on how leadership is currently conducted in the case companies. However, it is nevertheless interesting and relevant for the reader to know about the different tools and approaches to measuring the training and development programs of companies as well as their effectiveness.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Originally, Peters and Waterman's bestseller from 1982, 'In Search of Excellence', inspired this project; my supervisor and I had the vision that this project could be an updated version of the book from 1982. As it turned out, the project took a different turn, but I decided to hold on to the idea of writing this project as a book. This decision has had several implications for this project. First, the language and style of writing is willingly held in lighter wording, as it was my goal for this project not only to be readable for academics, but non-academics as well.

Next, the data of this project is largely based on semi-structured interviews conducted with employees from both Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur. Although the interviewees were all of Danish nationality the interviews were all conducted in English, with one exception. As English is not the native language of any of the interviewees certain difficulties with regards to expression and understanding have occurred at times; therefore, the direct

quotes used in this project have partially been altered with regards to correct wording in order to assure coherence and meaning. For example, a direct quote like this, *“I think generally... I think... I’ve experienced them as quite good, but of course I’ve run fairly fast and... I don’t know... I’ve never experienced that it hasn’t been good, but I mean, thinking practically about it of course...”* will be quoted in this paper as follows: *“Generally, I think I’ve experienced them as quite good. [...] I’ve never experienced it not being good.”*

Finally, due to my decision of writing this project as a book I decided to apply a structure that is rather unorthodox for a master thesis, and placed the methodology section at the end of the paper. This idea was inspired by Dr. Reza Aslan, an internationally acclaimed writer and scholar of religion, and author of the New York Times bestseller *‘Zealot: the Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth’* (2014). Due to his book’s release he was invited to the Spirited Debate on Fox News, amongst others, which resulted in a YouTube sensation as the host of the show asked highly inappropriate questions, such as *“Why would a Muslim be interested in writing a book about the founder of Christianity?”* The way Dr. Aslan handled the interview made me curious about him, so I searched for other videos and interviews, which eventually led me to an interview session at Harvard Divinity School titled *‘Inside the Scholar’s Studio: A Conversation with Reza Aslan’* (Harvard Divinity School, 2013). One of the last questions the narrator asks before the Question and Answer session with the audience begins, is about how Dr. Aslan managed to make his book so accessible so that even someone without a degree in religious studies can understand and follow his arguments throughout the book. Dr. Aslan’s response was to *“take the methodology and hide it in the back.”* According to him, this makes the points that the author makes much more accessible to the reader since *“the world doesn’t care, the world will just take your expertise at face value and doesn’t care how you came up with these ideas”* (00:29:27). With the idea in mind that I would like my thesis to be read as a book as well I felt inspired by Dr. Aslan’s statement and decided to follow his advice and positioned the methodology section of my paper in the back, so that it is accessible to those who are interested in reading it, but does not disturb the flow of the narrative for those who simply want to follow the arguments.

## **TOUR OF THE BOOK – CHAPTER DESCRIPTION**

In the following I will present the reader with a short but thorough description of the chapters following the introduction.

In chapter two I will present the two case companies, Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur, provide background information regarding the history of these companies as well as informing the reader about current leadership activities.

Chapter three, then, will go into detail of the different theories and terms used in this project, in order to provide the reader with the necessary knowledge to follow the arguments made throughout this project.

Next, in chapter four, the analysis and findings of the interviews will be presented. The empirical data from these interviews are the basis for investigating answers to the given research question.

Chapter five will present the discussion of the findings from the previous chapter as well as other data collected throughout the process of writing this project. The discussion is structured according to the sub-questions presented in the introduction.

Then, chapter six will provide the conclusion to the overall research question as well as summarize the outcome and implications of the analysis and discussion for the case companies.

Chapter seven is a one-page summary presenting the reader with other intriguing research areas I came across during the process of writing this project.

And finally, in chapter eight I will thoroughly elaborate on the methodological choices I have taken, which are building the underlying framework of this study.

Due to the vast extent of the appendix it was necessary to keep it on a digital copy, which is enclosed to this project. All figures and tables as well as the interview transcripts can be found on the appendix. The direct quotes mentioned in this project will be referred to with page- and line number, i.e. page 47, line 1626 will be referred to as (47-1626).

# CASE COMPANIES

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In the following I will give a brief introduction to the case companies, covering their history and ways of conducting leadership.

## **ROCKWOOL SCANDINAVIA A/S**

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Rockwool Scandinavia is a sub-division of Rockwool International, who is the world-leading supplier of products based on stone wool (Rockwool Scandinavia, 2014d). As financial and other background information on Rockwool Scandinavia alone was unavailable the numbers and key figures in this project refer to Rockwool International.

The Kähler and Henriksen families founded the company in 1937. After over twenty years of growth and expansions to other countries (Germany, Switzerland, and more) the founding families agreed to split up the conglomerate into separate companies, leaving the Kähler family with full ownership of what is known today as Rockwool (Rockwool Scandinavia, 2014a). To this day the family has a representative on the board of directors; Thomas Kähler (born 1970), the great-grandchild of the company's founder Valdemar Kähler (Jørgensen, 2012), is currently the managing director of Rockwool Scandinavia and the Second Deputy Chairman of the board of directors. He was elected in 2008 after his father, Tom Kähler, had resigned as chairman of the board (Jørgensen, 2012).

After starting out with two factories in Hedehusene, Denmark, and Skövde, Sweden, the company rose to success quickly. Today Rockwool International counts more than 10,500 employees in over 30 countries; Rockwool Scandinavia counts approximately 800 employees and is administering four factories, two in Denmark and two in Norway ("Guld 1000," 2014; Rockwool International Annual Report, 2013) .

In 2013 Rockwool International generated net sales of DKK 14,903 million with a profit of DKK 1,225 million before taxes, which ranks the company #32 on the Berlingske Business Guld 1000 list and #2 in the category Construction: Production of Building Materials ("Guld 1000," 2014).

## **THE ROCKWOOL WAY**

As part of the Rockwool Group, Rockwool International and Rockwool Scandinavia follow the core values of the company: honesty, responsibility, efficiency, passion, and entrepreneurship. These values are the basis of their management philosophy, their thinking, and their actions (Rockwool Scandinavia, 2014c). They call it the Rockwool Heartbeat, and it is meant to: 1) Make it possible to conduct business and decide quickly and efficiently without bureaucracy; 2) Determine the way business is done, the way employees work together and the way employees want to be perceived by their surroundings; 3) Determine the quality level of the way employees behave within the boundaries of the 'Principles of Leadership' program and Group policies. Table 1.A (appendix A) will give you a more detailed description of what these values imply.

In 2010, a change in company strategy has led the Rockwool Group Human Resource department to gather the different elements of leadership and employee direction (culture, mission, values etc.) under the umbrella that is now known as The Rockwool Way. The Rockwool Way consists of six elements: Trust and Empowerment, Values, the Rockwool Heartbeat, Mission, Group Policies and Manuals, and the Principles of Leadership program. In appendix A, you will find figure 1.B and table 1.B with more detailed descriptions of how these elements are connected. In the following I'd like to highlight the Principles of Leadership program, as it distinctively underlines the Rockwool Way of conducting leadership.

### **PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

According to the information provided by Rikke Præstmark, HR manager, the Principles of Leadership program (PL program) describes the relation between all employees in the organization; the program consists of three parts: the General Principles of Leadership, Relations Between Manager and Employee, and Relations Between Manager and Superior. appendix 2, p. 7, illustrates the line and staff relations. The general Principles of Leadership consist of the following guidelines:

1. Management is to reach goals by having task carried out by others;
2. Management is the most important responsibility of a manager;
3. A manager is responsible for everything within his/her area of responsibility;

4. A manager is responsible for the result of co-operation with colleagues in staff relationship;
5. A manager works actively on the development of the organization;
6. A manager contributes actively to own development;

(A more detailed description of these guidelines can be found in appendix 2, p. 14)

Furthermore, it is stated that a manager has to develop and motivate his or her employees and that qualified employees are considered a sign of good management (Appendix 2, p. 16, clause 11 & 14). All in all, this PL program is a list of rules and guidelines defining the hierarchy as well as a doctrine of how employees are to behave towards each other throughout the hierarchy.

## **THE ROCKWOOL UNIVERSITY**

In order to deliver and align the company strategy 'Rock the Globe' the Rockwool Group has established the Rockwool University, a leadership development opportunity for all Rockwool employees. The different programs offered are building on existing skills and competences of the individuals and focus especially on the subjects of leadership and sales (Rikke Præstmark, Appendix 1, figure 1.C). Furthermore, this university is a global project that all employees can participate in if their leader deems it relevant. The Rockwool University is also a means of strengthening the Rockwool Heartbeat and the PL program, and align all local sub-divisions, not only with the company strategy 'Rock the Globe', but also the mind-set of 'The Rockwool Way' (Appendix 1, figure 1.E).

As it is up to the manager to decide and sign off on whom of the employees is participating in a Rockwool University course, Rockwool Scandinavia does not have a fixed budget for these training programs. According to Rikke Præstmark the overall training budget varies a lot from year to year as it highly depends on the needs and priorities that Rockwool Scandinavia sees fit (Appendix 1, figure 1.D). Furthermore, Præstmark informed me that Rockwool Scandinavia does not have an exact method in place to measure the outcome and effects of the leadership training programs; the only way of measuring success or failure is dependent on the manager's evaluation of the dividend and the annual employee engagement survey where the managers are evaluated by their employees.

## **KOPENHAGEN FUR**

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Kopenhagen Fur is the world's largest auction house for fur and a global center for fur trading, internationally recognized for its exceptional quality of fur. It is a shared property cooperatively owned by the members of the Danish Fur Breeders Association (DFBA), which was founded in 1930; in 1946 the association acquired the Copenhagen Fur Centre (Kopenhagen Fur, 2014c). Kopenhagen Fur is a common description of both the association and the auction house. The association is made up of four local associations, namely the Northern Jutland Fur Breeders Association, the Mid-Jutland Fur Breeders Association, the Fyn- and Southern Jutland Fur Breeders Association, and the Zealand Fur Breeders Association, which also includes Bornholm (Kopenhagen Fur, 2014a).

Kopenhagen fur hosts five auction per year where approximately 21 million furs of mink, fox, rex rabbit and others are sold; mink fur makes up 90% of the total fur sold at these auctions. The high production volume, skilled sorters, and advanced technology have established Kopenhagen Fur as global market leader with a global market share of 60% (Kopenhagen Fur, 2014c).

In 2013, Kopenhagen Fur had a production of 17,2 million mink, which makes up  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the total Danish export to China (Kopenhagen Fur, 2014b). In the fiscal year 2012/13 net sales of DKK 968 million were generated, which is a 25% increase to the previous year. The profit of DKK 432 million equals a 16% increase to the previous year. These results have placed Kopenhagen Fur at #44 of the Berlingske Business Guld1000 list and at #2 of the category Trade: Trading Companies, with the highest growth percentage (31%) and the highest profit after taxes (DKK 371 million) ("Guld 1000," 2014).

As an auction venue and a fur breeders association Kopenhagen Fur is a B2B operation. Their customers are not the end-consumers, the people wearing the processed fur in the form of coats etc., but designers, buyers, and third-party sellers.



## **LEADERSHIP AT KOPENHAGEN FUR**

Until recently, Copenhagen Fur did not have any official leadership programs in place. Søren Skriver, HR manager, is currently working with his team on developing different programs. The budget for 2015 Skriver has anticipated to be around DKK 1.5 million; DKK 500.000-700.000 is budgeted for the current leader development program, which Skriver introduced in October 2014. Furthermore, DKK 300.000-400.000 are estimated for various leader-workshops of two to four days duration, and additionally, DKK 150.000 is used on leader networking activities via Netværk Danmark and the VL Group, as well as other activities such as communication workshops and courses with Harvard University (Appendix 3).

Furthermore, Skriver informed me that he and his colleagues from the HR department are measuring all competence development activities as well as leadership training development with various tools. Typically, a follow-up survey is distributed to the course- and workshop participants; sometimes this is supplemented through before- and after evaluations, as well as individual- and group evaluation meetings. As Skriver states (appendix 1, figure 3.A), it is important for Copenhagen Fur that the activities and programs have an effect and that there is a clear positive development, both with regards to competences and behavior.

# THEORY

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In this chapter I will define and explain the key terms and theories that are at the heart of this project. In order to be able to follow and understand the implications of this project, it is important for the reader to be familiar with these key terms and concepts. First, I will give a review of the term branding and what it means; then, I will highlight the difference between the terms leader and manager; next, the term leadership will be elaborated on; then, the concept of leadership brand will be introduced; the term leadership excellence will be clarified; and finally, measurements of leadership excellence will be commented on.

## **BRAND & BRANDING**

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The concept of branding derives from way back in the day when farmers used hot metal stamps to literally brand their livestock as a means of ownership and differentiation from other farmers' livestock. A farmer with a good reputation for high quality animals would experience higher demand than farmers with a lesser reputation (Blackett in Clifton, 2009). Today, the definition of branding and what it means to have a brand has vastly expanded and is much less literal than its origin.

Brands today have to connect and engage with consumers in ways they find relevant and stimulating (Oosthuizen, 2010); the whole brands experience, across all touch points is of utmost importance as any negative elements will weaken the brand (Oosthuizen, 2010). Companies like GE, Nike, Sony, and many more, own brands with high reputations for different qualities, which let them stand out from the crowd of their competitors. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) a brand is a "*Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.*" (American Marketing Association Dictionary, 2013). Dunn and Davis (2004) take it a step further and state:

*“[Brands] are a set of expectations and associations evoked from experiences with a company or product – how customers think and feel about what the business or product does. (...) Brands are built from the customer’s entire experience with a company, its products and its service”*

(Dunn & Davis, 2004, p. 241)

This definition clearly emphasizes on the intangible value of a brand. Branding is not just a marketing effort, but experiences with, and thoughts and feelings about a company or product.

Jones and Bonevac (2013) also raise the question whether the AMA’s definition is efficient and up to date. The authors are convinced that this definition is rather a description of what brands can be. Like Dunn and Davis, Jones and Bonevac argue that this definition fails to take into account what cannot be seen or heard, like the notion of brands being promises or contracts, images or personalities, and perceptions. Reviewing the literature, it became clear that the current AMA definition fails to take these views into account, which, however, does not make them any less true or correct. The issue with the AMA’s definition is that it gives no indication whatsoever of how to create, strengthen, or add value to a brand (Jones & Bonevac, 2013). According to the authors, *“A brand is a definition of a particular company or product”* (Jones & Bonevac, 2013, p. 117), meaning that a brand is capable of having a name, a logo, conveying promises, personalities and emotional characteristics etc., but they do not consist in any of these. They argue, *“[Like] definitions of words and terms help give meaning to those words and terms, brands give meaning to names, logos, etc.”* (Jones & Bonevac, 2013, p. 117). In order to define and thereby to brand something one must place it in a more general category for then to differentiate it from other things in that category (Jones & Bonevac, 2013). In other words, who are you as a brand, and what makes you unique?

Looking at brands as definitions allows for new possibilities to better understand what branding, at its core, is all about: defining how someone or something should- or wants to be perceived by key audiences. Most importantly, branding is about the relationship with customers; customers are the lifeblood of any organization (Mirza, 2012), therefore, any branding activity is, and should always be, focused on strengthening this relationship.

While Dunn and Davis focus more on the meaning or idea of how a brand is created, Jones and Bonevac focus more on how to define what a brand means. Both aspects are relevant for this project and will be applied to the findings and highlighted in the discussion.

## **LEADERSHIP**

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Leadership is one of the most debated topics in history (Kakabadse, 2000). Many people think that being a great leader is equal in meaning to great leadership, but this is not the case. Having a successful leader in an organization is not equal to great leadership being present in that organization. In other words, a single tree does not make forest.

According to Dr Paul M. Muchinsky (2012), "*Leadership implies providing a vision of the future and inspiring others to make that vision a reality*" (p. 394). Linda Hill argues that "*Leadership is about making emotional connections to motivate and inspire people.*" (Hemp, 2008, p. 124).

On the other hand, Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) state, "*Leadership emphasizes the qualities of leaders throughout an organization, [...] and the systems and processes that create these leaders*" (p. 1). Andrew Kakabadse (2000) underlines this by stating, "*Leadership thinking cannot solely concentrate on the individual. The impact of the individual [...] will need to be linked to a broader concept of enterprise value, be that shareholder or stakeholder value.*" While Muchinsky and Hill (and many other scholars) understand leadership as a combination of competences an individual leader displays, Ulrich and Smallwood, as well as Kakabadse, look at the organization that houses and nurtures the individual leaders.

Summing up, when talking about leadership one can either focus on the individual leader's ability and quality of leading others, or one can talk about the leadership capabilities of the company. Both aspects are highly interesting and relevant for this project; however, in this particular case I will focus on the leadership capability of the firm rather than the individual. Nevertheless, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership cultures in the case companies, it was necessary to gain more knowledge on possibly prevailing leadership styles at these companies. Therefore, the following section will provide an overview of different leadership styles, which the academic literature claims to be effective.

## LEADERSHIP STYLES

As mentioned previously, the debate on what it means and how to be a good leader has been going on for centuries (Zaballero & Park, 2012). Especially within the last couple of decades a vast number of researches have been conducted suggesting numerous theories on how to practice effective leadership. According to Kippenberger (2002) the concept of leadership style is defined as *“the style that a leader adopts in their dealing with those who follow them”* (p. 6). This definition, however, entails the assumption of a ‘right’ and a ‘wrong’ style (Kippenberger, 2002). Manfred Kets de Vries, on the other hand, understands the concept of leadership style as a point of interaction between three factors (Kets de Vries, 2001; in Kippenberger, 2002):

- The leader’s character type (attitudes, beliefs, values etc.)
- The followers character type (attitudes, belief, values etc.)
- The situation (nature of the task, the organization’s structure and culture, etc.)

As Kets de Vries further explained, an individual’s leadership style is very complex and the result of various factors such as character, temperament, and experience, amongst others (Kets de Vries, 2001; in Kippenberger, 2002). Since World War II, the body of research has focused on different factors of influence on leadership, such as traits, behaviors, and competences, which *“led the researchers to identify patterns of behavior (leadership styles) that enabled leaders to effectively influence others”* (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007, p. 517; in Zaballero & Park, 2012). In the following sections I will present and evaluate some of the more recent leadership style theories.

### CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Charismatic leadership is especially focused on the individuals’ characteristics, such as having a great deal of self-confidence, vision, and a dominant personality, amongst others (Kippenberger, 2002), which enables the charismatic leader to motivate others, inspire enthusiasm and confidence to succeed (Zaballero & Park, 2012). Kippenberger (2002), however, criticises that charismatic leadership may be a style of leadership, but not a leadership style that can be adopted without charisma. In other words, you have charisma or you do not, which implies that this style of leadership is unattainable through learning.

### **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Transformational leadership is about demonstrating the ability to transform and empower others through showing inspiration and motivation, and showing a keen sense of emotional intelligence (Eden, Dvir, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Kakabadse, 2000; Zaballero & Park, 2012). Leaders practising this leadership style are said to prioritise the organizational performance instead of self-interest (Zaballero & Park, 2012). Dennis Tourish (2013) criticised in his book 'The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership' that this type of leadership *"comes with a potential or actual dark side, arising from the leader's propensity to megalomania, narcissism, and authoritarianism."* In other words, the transformational leadership style's objective is to transform people to the better, but is highly dependent on the leader's own morals and ethics.

### **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Servant Leadership is particularly concerned with focusing on the followers' needs to become healthier, wiser, and more enthusiastic towards their work (Zaballero & Park, 2012). Leaders who practice this style of leadership are careful not to dominate their followers (Zaballero & Park, 2012), but willingly sacrifice their own success for the benefit of their followers' empowerment, development, and well-being (Greenleaf, 1970; in Kippenberger, 2002). In other words, for the servant leader the followers come first, then comes the organization. The theory further outlines a series of characteristics such as listening, empathy, and awareness, amongst others, which need to be mastered for the successful practice of servant leadership (Russel & Stone, 2002). These characteristics are also the downside of this leadership style. Focusing on characteristics or attributes raises the question whether or not these are inherent or can be learned (Andersen, 2009). Furthermore, the literature has identified more than 20 attributes of servant leadership (Russel & Stone, 2002), which leads to the question of applicability in real life, as it is unlikely that one leader will be able to display all of these characteristics.

### **AFFILIATIVE LEADERSHIP**

Affiliative Leadership is based on three principles, namely openness to multiple perspectives, learning how to create trust, and learning to set aside individual control for shared control (Gagnon, Vough, & Nickerson, 2012). In other words, leaders who practice this style are open to other's opinions, are trusted by their followers, and share the control through collaborative problem solving and joint working (Gagnon et al., 2012). This leadership style is very much focused on collaboration and the 'we', however, this can also become an issue. If too much

control is given to the employees there could, in fact, emerge a lack in leadership, as no one would set the direction.

## **LEADERSHIP BRAND**

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Most of today's literature on leadership takes on an inside-out approach, meaning that the focus is almost entirely on what goes on inside a person and/or organization (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). Leadership brand is a relatively new strategic approach towards leadership and leadership development that is about moving the focus to an outside-in approach and thereby bridging the firm's identity in the mind of the outside (customers and investors) with the behavior of the inside (leaders and employees). The authors describe a leadership brand as "*The identity of the firm in the mind of the customer made real to employees because of customer-centric leadership behaviors*" (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b, p. xi). In other words, it is about placing the customers' and investors' perceptions, expectations, and experiences at the heart of any employee behavior and decision making process. However, this does not mean that the focus should solely be on the outside. A strong leadership brand begins with a strong personal leadership brand (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). Unless every leader in a company can demonstrate to be living and acting by this principle, the leadership brand for the company will be invalid as it is an "*extension of an organization's brand or identity*" (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b, p. xi).

The metaphor of brand was successfully clarified by Suzanne Bates (2012) who stated that a (company's) brand is a reputation "*that [...] is the perception about who you are*" (Bates, 2012, p. 35). She further stressed that the perception about who you are is to be understood as what others, hence customers and investors, believe about you as a company. According to Ulrich and Smallwood and like-minded scholars, having a leadership brand is an intangible asset of the firm; customers choose brands because they identify with them (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010), thus, in order to build the bridge between the outside and the inside, the leadership brand must reflect the company brand.

The research of Ulrich and Smallwood has shown that in many, if not most cases, there is a gap between the outside's perception and the inside's behavior. Closing this gap through leadership brand is not about letting the customer dictate the activities of the firm, but rather

looking at and understanding the company brand from the customers' point of view; the leadership of a company needs to reflect the company brand. Furthermore, brands are only useful if they create value for the customer, and that value has to be defined by the receiver, not the sender (Ulrich in Shelton, 2011).

As mentioned previously, the concept of leadership brand moves the focus from the skill-set of individual leaders to the development of leadership as a company capability, which thereby also shifts the focus to the leadership bench. As the authors phrase it, *"it is the strength of the leadership bench that promotes investor, customer, and employee confidence in the future, which translates into higher market value"* (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b, p. 6). It is not only about having strong and effective leaders that bridge outside expectations with inside behaviors, but about developing and nurturing a leadership culture that becomes deeply rooted in the minds and behaviors of leaders at all levels of the organization; *"Leadership brand is a reputation for developing exceptional managers with a distinct set of talents that are uniquely geared to fulfill customers' and investors' expectations"* (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007a, p. 94). The true strength of leadership brand is reflected in the leadership bench, hence the type of leader a company was able to engender who live up to and deliver on the expectations and values customers and investors care about, thereby promoting confidence in future performance. Table 2 illustrates some of the companies, which Ulrich and Smallwood have used as examples of leadership brand.

**Table 1:** What Companies and Their Leaders are Known for (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007a, p. 94)

	This organization is known for...	Leaders at this organization are known for...
Wal-Mart	Always low price	Managing costs efficiently, getting things done on time
FedEx	Absolutely, positively doing whatever it takes	Managing logistics, meeting deadlines, solving problems quickly
P&G	Brands you know and trust	Developing consumer insights, precisely targeted marketing, product innovation
McKinsey	Being a CEO's trusted adviser	Leading teams that deconstruct business problems, synthesize data, and develop solutions
Apple	Innovation and design	Creating new products and services that break the industry norms



## **LEADERSHIP CODE & DIFFERENTIATORS**

As was also touched upon in the brand section, Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) suggest that any brand consists of two elements, namely the fundamentals (the leadership code) and the differentiators (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). The leadership code is the invisible fundamentals of leadership that all leaders need to master in order to be effective. To put it in lighter wording, the leadership code is the fundamentals, the invisible basics, which every leader needs to internalize in order for business to run smoothly. The leadership differentiators, on the other hand, are the elements of leadership, which the firm's customers regard as important or valuable (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). The authors used the example of a car to illustrate the meaning behind the leadership fundamentals and differentiators: a car needs a chassis, drive chain, suspension system etc. manufactured in the highest quality in order to be regarded as excellent; these are the fundamentals. The visible differentiators, namely body, style, fabrics, accessories etc. are suited for one customer segment or another. However, if the invisible fundamentals are manufactured with low quality, it does not matter how well the visible differentiators are made – the car would not be considered to be excellent. This example effectively demonstrates why the authors regard both the leadership code and the leadership differentiators as important. Figure 4.A (appendix 4) illustrates how a leadership brand is build up and figure 4.B summarizes the five dimensions of the leadership code.

As emphasized by the box on the next page, as well as figure 4.B, the leadership code consists of five dimensions: strategist, executor, talent manager, human capital developer, and personal proficiency.

The authors repeatedly underline the importance and necessity for leaders to become proficient in these categories. Mastering these basic and effectively demonstrating the company specific differentiators is what makes an excellent leader according to Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b).

### Box 1: The Five Dimensions of the Leadership Code

Strategist	Leaders need to have a point of view about the future and be able to position the firm for future customers.
Executor	Leaders need to be able to make things happen, to deliver results, to make change happen, to be technically literate, and to build organization systems that work.
Talent Manager	Leaders need to work with their current employees, to motivate, communicate, and encourage them.
Human Capital Developer	Leaders need to work on future employees, to delegate and build future talent.
Personal Proficiency	Leaders need to gain personal credibility through their ability to learn, act with integrity, exercise social and emotional intelligence, make bold and courageous decisions, and engender trust.

Leadership brand is an interesting new approach in the search of excellent leadership that moves the focus from the development of the individual leader to the development of leadership as a company capability. The skills and talents of the individual are regarded highly relevant, however, considering the leadership capability of a firm as a resource of success could open a new door on the way to leadership excellence.

## LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word excellent means '*extremely good*' or '*outstanding*'. Despite this quite simple definition countless books, articles, and dissertations prove that defining how to become (and remain) excellent is a quite difficult endeavor.

Achieving leadership excellence is the goal of any attempt to develop or improve leadership capabilities. Today, however, a company's excellence appears to mostly be judged by its revenue and turnover. Reporting high revenue and strong and stable financial statements speaks for itself, as it is very unlikely that a company would be regarded as excellent without these. The Danish newspaper Berlingske Tidende even publishes an annual list of the 1000 best Danish companies according to turnover. However, I believe that limiting the criterion of

what it means to be an excellent company and run an excellent business to merely financial statements is not sufficient. In my opinion, an outstanding financial performance is the result of other factors such as outstanding leadership and outstanding brand value, amongst others.

## **MEASURING LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE**

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It is one thing to develop a model or theory, which supposedly increases a company's leadership excellence, another thing is to be able to measure whether or not this actually is the case. Most of the models and theories are brought to companies through leadership training programs; according to the literature the quality of these programs is directly linked to the quality of leadership. The assumption is that if the training program is not appropriately or insufficiently implemented, and if the company does not have an effective method of measuring the effects in place, it will not be possible to establish excellent leadership in that company. The following sections are dealing with the evaluation of training programs and the measurability of their effects. The aim of this section is to provide a basic understanding of the idea behind measuring leadership and leadership training programs, as the case companies' ways of doing so will be part of the discussion and conclusion.

As with any other aspect of business there is a vast amount of literature suggesting how best to measure leadership and its effects (Kanji, 2008). Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2008, p. ix) point out that "*business leaders want to see value for their investment*", and Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) illustrate the necessity and importance of measuring whether or not the leadership training programs are actually making the companies better. In this regard, the opinions highly differ on how to measure and what to measure. Like distinguishing between leaders and leadership, it is important to differentiate between the development of the individual leader's skills and the development of the company's overall leadership capability. Again, this distinction matters, as they are not the same, although they are intertwined.

Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) argue that companies are often compelled to measure "*what is easy, not what is right*" (p. 131), meaning that instead of measuring the actual effect of training programs companies rather focus on the evaluation by participants. The authors further argue that this way of measuring is insufficient as it does not give any clarity about the impact of the investment (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). According to them, the investors of these

programs (mostly the CEO's) are concerned about market valuation, profitability, cash flow, cost to produce, and working capital ratios. Therefore, measuring the participants' evaluation of the training programs is unsatisfactory.

Furthermore, Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) argue that the measurement of leadership effectiveness has been dominated by two approaches in particular: the competence approach and the concrete return approach. The competence approach focuses on the personal competences of individual leaders and follows the dogma 'if we build competences, results will follow' (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). An example of the competence approach is the Leadership Excellence Model (LEM) created by Kanji & Moura E Sá (2001), which focuses on measuring the performance of individual leaders of a company, in order to establish the Leadership Excellence Index (LEX). Figure 4.C (appendix 4) illustrates this model. Without going too much into detail, this model focuses on highly generic competences and therefore fails to appropriately measure the leadership excellence of a company. The problem with focusing solely on the competence of individual leaders is that this approach is very indirect; there are too many different competences for companies to choose from as a study from New York State in 2002 illustrated (Sinnot, Madison, & Pataki, 2002). This report lists a total of 46 different competences from which companies could develop their specific competence models. These competences, although displayed among leaders, are no evidence or guarantee for leadership results (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b).

Although the leadership skills of individuals are an important part of the leadership capability of a company, Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) argue that, in order to measure the actual effect of leadership training programs, the focus should lie on the return on investment. They acknowledge the importance of developing the individual leaders, but lay their focus on the measurement of the leadership capability of the firm. Ulrich and Smallwood, like many others, base their measurement system on the studies of Donald Kirkpatrick who identified four dimensions of impact:

Reaction: Did the participants enjoy the training experience?

Learning: Did the participants learn something from the training experience?

Behavior: Did the participants change behavior as result of the training experience?

Results: Did the participants apply the learning in a way that produced a tangible return on investment? (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2008)

According to Ulrich and Smallwood, it seems that the majority of attempts to measure training programs fail to really measure the last dimension, results.

As was confirmed by the mentioned authors, Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick have summarized why measuring the effectiveness of training programs and the outcomes of such are important:

- 1) To justify the existence and budget of the training department by showing how it contributes to the organization's objectives and goals;
- 2) To decide whether to continue or discontinue training programs;
- 3) To gain information on how to improve future training programs.

(Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2008, p. 17)

Concluding, measuring the effects of leadership training programs is important; companies spend huge amounts of money on these programs and need to know whether their investments is worthwhile. A failure to do so is a waste of money and time, but not investing in leadership training programs would be a waste of opportunity to improve the company's performance. Therefore, companies need sufficient and appropriate systems to measures these effects and give them a clear answer to whether the investment is worth it or not. Unfortunately, it seems that there has not been developed a standard way of measuring the effects of training programs that focuses on the leadership capability of the firm rather than the qualities and skills of the individual leader, nor has anyone found a standard way of measuring good leadership, which raises the question whether of not this is even possible.

# ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

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In this chapter I will you a presentation and analysis of the findings from the conducted interviews. First, the findings from Rockwool Scandinavia are presented, followed by the presentation of findings from Kopenhagen Fur. Both parts are divided according to the following topics: Understanding of Branding; Understanding of Good Leadership; Current Status of the Leadership Culture; Customer Focus; and Understanding of Leadership Brand. Each topic ends with a short summary. This chapter is meant to give the reader an overview of the responses and tendencies expressed by the interviewees. As a reminder, quotes of the interviewees will be referred to with page- and line number, hence page 5, line 10 will be referenced (5-10). You can find all interview transcripts in he Appendix.

## ROCKWOOL SCANDINAVIA

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Rockwool Scandinavia is a company with a long history and great success, who values their traditions and ways of doing business. In the following I will present some of the perceptions of current employees with regards to the leaders and leadership, as well as the concept of branding, and customer focus at Rockwool Scandinavia. I had the pleasure of interviewing the following managers:

- Klaus Hovmøller, Technical Director, ten years at Rockwool Scandinavia;
- Marina Mazin, Marketing Manager, fourteen and a half years at Rockwool Scandinavia;
- Rikke Præstmark, HR Manager, seven and a half years at Rockwool Scandinavia;
- Kristian Dalhof, Finance Manager, two and a half years at Rockwool Scandinavia.

## UNDERSTANDING OF BRANDING

Branding is a concept that might seem strange to anyone without relations to the marketing department; however, it gains increasing relevance for other departments, as it is more and more important for companies to display consistency and coherency in communicating who they are, what they do, and why throughout the entire organization and towards all

stakeholders. Although branding was associated with notions such as promise, image, and characteristics of a company, all of the interviewees mentioned the key word 'value' in one way or another. Klaus Hovmøller associated branding with a *"set of values or beliefs"* (27-126); Marina Mazin stated that the brand is what the company *"promises to the customer"* (44-650); Rikke Præstmark thought it is about *"telling something good or valuable about something"* (36-408); and Kristian Dalhof believes that *"branding is to add value"* (49-819). Having worked at a marketing company Dalhof added that branding is also about knowing how the brand can help you to sell something: *"The brand value is worth nothing if you are not able to capitalize on it."* (49-822).

Overall, there has been a clear tendency towards the association between branding and values; however, it also became evident that the respondents viewed branding mostly as a means for the company to display a desired image.

## **UNDERSTANDING OF GOOD LEADERSHIP**

The terms leader and leadership appeared to be very closely related according to the interviewees, which is why their responses on these terms have overlapped.

When asked about what good leadership is to them, the responses were quite different and yet somehow fit together. According to the interviewees, good leadership is about involving employees and setting clear goals; giving fair and constructive feedback; having a real contact with the employees and building a relationship with them; clear communication; being honest and treat people with respect.

Marina Mazin and Kristian Dalhof both expressed their belief that good leadership is extremely individual. As Dalhof commented, *"Leadership for me is very much related to the individual leader."* (49-837) In this regard, Marina Mazin further highlighted the importance of *"doing the right things for the [individual] people."* (42-592). Dalhof further stated that, for him, leadership is about understanding what moves the individual: *"It's important that you take the time and talk to people [...] especially when you [attempt to] build a relationship with the employees when they are not pressured – that's where you build the relationship the most."* (47-766). Rikke Præstmark also indicated that good leadership is concerned with the relationship between leaders and employees, as she commented, *"Good leadership is having a real contact*

*between you and your employees [and] communicating in a language that they understand and prefer.” (33-294). Concluding from these statements, good leadership is about communicating and building relationships with the employees, hence, it is understood to be highly individual.*

Klaus Hovmøller made another very interesting comment, which particularly caught my eye, *“In essence, I think we are talking about respect; the respect in giving people responsibility and require them to deliver, but also respect in giving them context and [letting them] participate in setting the scene.” (25-38). In other words, showing people respect in trusting them to fulfill their responsibilities and involving them in them in developing the goals and future direction.*

Summing up, the interviewees’ understanding of what is good leadership are very much related to what they believe is a good leader. To them, good leadership is highly individual and varies in perception depending on whom you are talking to. Furthermore, good leadership is about a real contact between the manager and the employees and about building a relationship. Trust, respect, involvement, proper communication, and motivation were all mentioned as being crucial elements of good leadership.

## **CURRENT STATUS OF THE LEADERSHIP CULTURE**

When I asked the interviewees whether they consider the leaders at Rockwool to be representative for the different qualities they mentioned a leader should have. Klaus Hovmøller, Marina Mazin, and Rikke Præstmark all responded with ‘pretty good’, ‘yes’, and ‘very good’; only Kristian Dalhof was more critical, which will be elaborated upon on the following page.

### **LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP**

A point which three out of the four respondents mentioned was the Rockwool peer-program, which is part of the Principles of Leadership program (see chapter two), stating that any employee only has one manager who has the authority to delegate tasks. This means that even if the leader’s superior asks an employee to carry out a task the employee can go to his or her direct leader and ask for approval. I gained the impression that this is rooted very deeply in the Rockwool way of leading. It is this exact tradition, only to have one manager, which was highly criticized by Kristian Dalhof. In his opinion,



*“I think this worked really well up until 2000 where you had these more military ways of leading; now you are more depending on your people to be able to think for themselves and being able to work across the organization.” (50-855).*

He further stated that if the employees were to really stick to the peer-program, then he sees Rockwool as being behind other companies. Dalhof criticized the way that the responsibility is kept among higher-ranking management instead of having it as far down the organization as possible. In his opinion, many employees at Rockwool do not take responsibility for their own actions because ‘their manager approved it’; he sees this attitude as an excuse and argues that he wants the employees to think for themselves. Due to this, in his opinion, silo-mentality and micromanagement he rated Rockwool low on leadership (3 out of 10), whereas Klaus Hovmøller seemed more positive and rated Rockwool leadership as *“above average, but not much.”* (28-159). All interviewees made statements relating to the themes of trust and empowerment, however, the peer-program at Rockwool does not seem to actually promote this encouragement.

#### **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Another part of a leadership culture at Rockwool is concerned with the development of employees and leaders. The interviewees mentioned different development strategies such as performance reviews, which are held three times a year, development opportunities such as successor and talent management programs, and the Rockwool University.

Klaus Hovmøller informed me that the performance reviews have different purposes; the first review is about setting goals; the second one is a follow up on the first review and is more focused on the soft side of management; and the third one is a final follow up on the goals, which were previously defined, and new goals are formulated.

Rikke Præstmark, HR manager and responsible for leadership development in Rockwool Scandinavia, points out that the way leaders and other employees are evaluated is highly individual; it is evaluated in which categories, according to Principles of Leadership and the Rockwool Heartbeat, the individual needs more development. Following this evaluation the HR team decides whether or not there is a suitable course offered by the Rockwool University, or if it makes more sense to send the employee to one of the local institution, such as Copenhagen Business School.

With regards to successor and talent management Klaus Hovmøller made an interesting point; he stated, *“There is never just a vacancy ready [...] if you need to move people, you need to create vacancies.”* (29-187). He further pointed out that this, of course, leaves an open spot in another area of the business, if someone is moved internally.

While the other interviewees focused on the overall development opportunities in Rockwool Scandinavia, Kristian Dalhof commented more on the development in his own department, where, as he stated, there is a lot of focus on people development and a good dialog. In the finance department, he said they talk a lot about the next opportunities for their employees, *“What is the next step for them; how are we working; what’s the possibility?”* (51-890). Simultaneously, he remained skeptical towards the Rockwool heartbeat idea; in Rockwool, the heartbeat is synonymous with ‘this is how we do at Rockwool’. Dalhof criticizes that many of his colleagues are not as much focused on change management as he is and stated, *“When I talk to my co-leaders I have the feeling that we are not driving in the same direction.”* (52-915).

Summing up, the leadership culture in Rockwool Scandinavia, with special focus on the peer-program, seems to be deeply rooted in the minds of the employees. The overall attitudes of the longer employed interviewees towards this tradition were positive, however, it was also highly criticized by Kristian Dalhof. Furthermore, Rockwool offers different development opportunities to its employees, yet it is questionable to which extent these actually are sensible, as Klaus Hovmøller indicated that open positions are rare. Overall, I gained the impression that the leadership culture is deeply rooted in Rockwool’s history.

## **CUSTOMER FOCUS**

The customer is one of the most important stakeholders of any company; therefore, I found it necessary to gaining a better insight to what standpoint the customer holds at Rockwool Scandinavia, even at departments that are not in direct contact with them.

All interviewees agreed that in recent years the customer focus has increased more and more, although they differ in stating for how long. Klaus Hovmøller stated that the customer focus is a result of the change in global strategy from five years ago, while Marina Mazin ascribes the change to the negative result of a customer satisfaction analysis, which was conducted about a year ago. Rikke Præstmark further mentioned a project called ‘customer orientation’ which is

currently in progress. Additionally, it needs to be highlighted that all respondents confirmed an increase in focus on customers in the form of satisfaction surveys, in an attempt to uncover what customers really want. Marina Mazin, though, made an interesting point by questioning what it really means to have customer focus, *“You can’t just give the customer whatever [...] you need to earn some money, too.”* (42-705) She further stated that it is a difficult balancing act between what the customer wants and what the company should be willing to give. In other words, she is questioning the degree to which a company should make the customer the basis for every business decision.

Klaus Hovmøller made another interesting statement saying that customer focus has always been present in the sales force and marketing department, however, he also pointed out, *“In every other theory you read on the customer-oriented organization, you need to align the full organization.”* (29-207). Hovmøller further mentioned a ‘lean manager’ being hired for Rockwool Scandinavia whose task it is to make the company more effective and efficient. Although he did not state this specifically I gained the impression from Hovmøller that the company is not fully aligned with regards to customer focus.

Kristian Dalhof further criticized the communication regarding the findings of the customer survey; he stated, *“How to gather this intel and communicate [it] to the broader masses of the company – I think that is something that could be done even more.”* (52-944). In other words, there appears to be a lack in communicating the results of the satisfaction surveys to all of the company.

Summing up, I gained the impression that there is a rather large focus on customer orientation and satisfaction within Rockwool Scandinavia. However, it was pointed out that there might be inconsistency between conducting customer satisfaction surveys and communicating the results throughout the organization. It was also questioned to which extent the company should make the customer the number one priority for business decisions. Overall, I gained the impression that, on the surface, there is a vast focus on the customer and customer satisfaction; however, it appears that the new customer-orientation program and its implications is not thoroughly communicated throughout all levels of the organization.

## UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP BRAND

Guided by the research question, I was curious whether the theory of leadership brand is known among the Rockwool Scandinavia employees. Klaus Hovmøller and Marina Mazin both did not know what leadership brand is about, and also Rikke Præstmark only had a vague idea, while Kristian Dalhof seemed to have heard about the concept before, but was skeptical towards implementation.

Although Hovmøller had never heard about the term leadership brand before, he mentioned the strong need for a value-set in companies. In his opinion, *“the value-set you are demonstrating as a manager needs to go hand in hand with the brand association.”* (27-136). In other words, the value-set of the brand and the value-set demonstrated by the manager or leader needs to be aligned. Marina Mazin also pointed out the alignment between company brand and employee behavior and commented, *“[Rockwool Scandinavia is] considered to be very trustworthy, very technical, very reliable. [...] So in this matter, [...] it is important to me [that] my employees as well are trustworthy, so it supports our brand.”* (44-658). Rikke Præstmark stated that she relates leadership brand to selling your ideas to your employees and getting them engaged. She further highlighted that she understands the term brand, in this relation, as a means of engaging people to *“reach the goal together and fulfill [the] obligation to the organization.”* (36-420). Although the interviewees have given some decent suggestions it is evident that the concept of leadership brand as defined by Ulrich and Smallwood is utterly unknown to them.

Kristian Dalhof, on the other hand, seemed more familiar with the term as he stated, *“GE for example, that is a brand – a leadership brand. That is a way of doing business.”* (49-832). However, he appeared to be very critical towards the concept and highlighted that, in his opinion, it is very difficult to have a leadership brand as leadership is very closely related to the leader him or herself. He further emphasized that due to the different styles of leading it would be very hard for Rockwool Scandinavia to build a leadership brand, as it would also take a long time for people to getting to work in the same way.

Summing up, it has become clear that the concept of leadership brand is largely unknown at Rockwool Scandinavia. Only Kristian Dalhof had some more knowledge on the concept than his colleagues, although he did not appear to understand the concept as described by Ulrich and Smallwood.

## **KOPENHAGEN FUR**

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Kopenhagen Fur has a long and proud history in the fur industry and praises themselves on their knowledge and expertise. In the following I will analyze the findings of the four interviews with Kopenhagen Fur employees whom I had the pleasure to interview:

- Brian Tufvesson, Head of Customer Department, sixteen years at Kopenhagen Fur;
- Ditte Sorknæs, VP of Marketing Department, ten years at Kopenhagen Fur;
- Marlene Uttenthal, Production Manager, one year at Kopenhagen Fur;
- Søren Skriver, Human Resource Manager, one year at Kopenhagen Fur.

### **UNDERSTANDING OF BRANDING**

As mentioned previously, branding is a concept that can seem very difficult to understand by anyone outside of the marketing department. Surprisingly, the employees at Kopenhagen Fur all had a similar understanding of the term.

Brian Tufvesson understood branding as a part of marketing, and marketing, according to him, is about getting yourself known by other people. In other words, marketing and branding are about being known for something in other people's minds. Also Søren Skriver understands branding as a means of communication and stated, *"It's what you are known for, what qualities that would pop into peoples minds if they say your name or [...] product."* (56-65). This view on branding was further underlined by Marlene Uttenthal who emphasized on branding being a means to promote one self as a company, both internally and externally. While both Tufvesson and Skriver emphasized on the outside view, Uttenthal was more eager to emphasize on the internal aspect. In her opinion, it is also important to brand your company internally in order to let every employee know 'This is what we stand for as a company' and 'This is what we are proud of', amongst others. She further highlighted how branding yourself internally is about communicating 'Why we are doing this', which, in her opinion, makes it easier to achieve the common goal as everyone knows what the common goal is.

When it comes to branding and marketing Ditte Sorknæs has somewhat of a home field advantage; as the VP of marketing at Kopenhagen Fur she works with these terms on a daily basis and can be regarded as an expert. She confirmed her colleagues' statements by

explaining that branding is “*a matter of positioning your company, your product, your leadership.*” (90-1229). She further elaborated how she thinks of branding in terms of how the company is perceived in the general society in Denmark.

Summing up, all respondents understood branding as the way the company, and everything associated with the company, is positioned and externally perceived, hence by the outside world. Only Marlene Uttenthal also mentioned the inside’s perception. Overall, the respondents did connect the concept to the outside’s perceptions of the company; however, they did not give the impression that branding is anything but a marketing tool.

## **UNDERSTANDING OF GOOD LEADERSHIP**

As previously mentioned in the analysis of Rockwool Scandinavia, the terms leader and leadership are very closely related, which is why some overlaps in the responses have occurred. Interestingly, all of the respondents addressed one theme in particular, namely developing their employees. The box below highlights some of the quotes regarding this topic.

*“Leadership is how to role out people’s capacity and bring them to a motivated state of working, and developing people.” - Søren Skriver (54-30)*

*“Good leadership is to be able to lead, to really be in front, to make sure that everybody has the knowledge that they need to have so that they can work independently.” - Ditte Sorknæs (87-1102)*

*“For me, leadership is actually about developing people. [...] The most exciting thing about being a leader is to see your own employees grow.” - Brian Tufvesson (62-286)*

*“Leadership is when you [...] think about ‘How can I change these people in to being better workers, and develop them to give much more at the job than they believe they are able to.’ - Marlene Uttenthal (72-618)*

In other words, developing employees seemed to have a high stand among all interviewees. Ditte Sorknæs made an interesting comment stating, *“I have no fear of my employees becoming better than me; in my opinion it would actually really rub-off on me and show that I was a good leader”* (63-1076). To her, developing her employees so extensively that they could potentially surpass her is a seal of quality of her own leadership. Sorknæs further underlined how good leadership to her is first and foremost about going in front and showing the willingness to take risks.

Brian Tufvesson, on the other hand, emphasized how leadership is about removing all the ‘little things’, hence, making sure everything is running smoothly so that his employees can concentrate on their job. He underlined this point by commenting, *“The better a leader can show how he or she wants the job to be done, and how he or she can show where the boundaries are, the better it is for the employees.”* (63-316). In other words, Brian Tufvesson understands leadership

For Marlene Uttenthal leadership means to be particularly close to the people as she highlighted with the following comments:

*“When talking about leadership, then I think we’re more working with people and development, and propulsion. [...] The employees are the most important [resource], especially here with us. [...] It is so important to us that they are happy and thrive and that they have the competences they feel they should have.”* (72-626).

To her, good leadership is about having a dialog with the employees, deciding on personal goals in cooperation with them and following up on these goals. In other words, Uttenthal views good leadership as always having the employees in mind and not only prioritize the development of the department, but also the development of each employee.

Summing up, it turned out that good leadership in Kopenhagen Fur is highly related to developing employees. Good leadership, according to the respondents, is not solely about having the grant overview and making sure everything is running smoothly so employees can focus on their jobs, but about viewing the employees as important resources, which need to be developed and groomed in order to assure high performance in the future. However, none of the respondent connected the term leadership with the company’s capability to produce competent leaders.

## CURRENT STATUS OF THE LEADERSHIP CULTURE

### LEADERS AT KOPENHAGEN FUR

When I asked the interviewees about the current culture and alignment of leaders at Copenhagen Fur with the qualities they deemed as important, the answers varied and yet painted a similar picture; all respondents emphasized on how they have experienced some change over the years, or are experiencing change right now.

Brian Tufvesson has been with Copenhagen Fur for over fifteen years and described to me how things have changed in this course of time. According to him, Copenhagen Fur has gone from applying a top-down management approach to a more mixed approach where the employees are given more control and power to make their own decisions. He further stated that fifteen years is a short time for cultural change to fasten and that the change has not yet reached all parts of the company. Without mentioning any specifics, he emphasized that there are still some leaders who are practicing, and employees who are used to, the top down approach, which results in employees being unable or uncomfortable with making decisions on their own. Søren Skriver confirmed this tendency to a top-down approach, but stressed that it is highly dependent on which part of the organization one is speaking of. Some leaders are apparently very much into the 'expert role', and when it comes to inspiring people, Skriver said, there are some serious lacks in competence.

With regards to lacks in competences, especially in terms of developing people, Ditte Sorknæs also stated that top management has not formulated an internal company strategy. She highlighted that top management is putting too much trust in employees and comments, "*I know for a fact that we have top management that truly believes that this is already done.*" (92-1284). In other words, Sorknæs believes that top management is putting too much faith in the leaders of the different departments to handle employee development, and apparently do not realize the existing variations between departments. Sorknæs further emphasized on these apparent misalignment within the company:

*"We have some departments where we have much better leadership [...] where they are tremendously good at this; and then we have some where it's the exact opposite, where you can see fantastic talent just sitting there, just waiting for things to happens and maybe even push for things to happen. And with these people normally one of two things happen: either they become*



*bored and they just sit there and do their everyday task and don't really develop themselves; or they leave the company.” (92-1287).*

This statement was further underlined by a story by Marlene Uttenthal. In the one year she has been with the company she already experienced quite the shock when suddenly a large group of employees quit their jobs in production, which forced her to hire 30 new employees. Uttenthal stated that the company has mainly focused on reaching their targets: *“Do we reach what we need to? Do we earn what we need to? Do we produce the quality that we need to? This is what good leadership was measured by.” (76-756).* She further mentioned a certain pride among Copenhagen Fur employees, especially within production, in regards to being able to handle and deliver the vast amounts of fur that they do, however, it turned out that this pride and a good salary was not enough. Many of the employees who quit had been with the company for 10-12 years, and many of them told Uttenthal the reason for their resignation was simply that they wanted to try something new and were eager to develop themselves. Naturally, many other factors must have played into these resignations as well, however, it is curious that the lack of personal development opportunities was on the top of Uttenthal's mind when talking about this topic.

Summing up, it became evident that there is more than one area in which the interviewees see a misalignment regarding leadership within the company. The statements by the employees indicate that top management apparently has a different view on the current status of leadership at Copenhagen Fur than is actually the case. Furthermore, it was mentioned that different approaches to leadership as well as developing employees are practiced throughout the company. In the next section I will elaborate on the perceived quality of leadership at Copenhagen Fur, according to the interviewees.

#### **LEADERSHIP QUALITY**

When talking about the quality of leadership at Copenhagen Fur the opinions were rather divided. Ditte Sorknæs, who has been with the company for over ten years, stressed that she was only able to talk about the quality of administration at Copenhagen Fur, as she sees the company to be too divided to really be able to comment on the leadership in other departments.

Brian Tufvesson, who has been with the company for over fifteen years, rated the general quality of leadership at Copenhagen Fur rather low, at 4 to 5 out of 10. He explains this low

rating by stating, “[We] have some leaders who are really going in the right direction [...] but [we] also have others that are really old-school and who are still practicing the top-down management.” (66-416). However, he further stated that he does not see this as a problem. According to him, having all leaders in the organization leading in the same way would not be the right direction to go in. In other words, he believes it to be okay for leaders to be different and lead in different ways. This statement is somewhat contradicting; Tufvesson apparently does not see a problem with the mixed approach, however, rating the overall quality of the company at 4 or 5 is not particularly a sign of excellence.

Marlene Uttenthal, who has been with the company for a little over a year, rates the overall leadership quality at Copenhagen Fur at a 7 out of 10. She explained this rating by evaluating Copenhagen Fur high on the ‘human part’; she again pointed out that it is important to develop people and that it is not enough to simply make the daily routine run smoothly.

Summing up, the views on the general leadership quality at Copenhagen Fur are rather divided. The respondents’ statements indicate that there is no alignment of leadership quality between the different departments. Furthermore, it became evident that there are several approaches present as to how leadership is conducted at Copenhagen Fur. In the next section I will review the company’s leadership development opportunities.

#### **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

In order to gain a better understanding of the leadership culture within Copenhagen Fur I touched upon the topic of leadership development opportunities. My assumption was that any strong leadership culture is focused on preparing the next generation of leaders.

Three out of the four respondents confirmed that until recently there was no structure or programs initiated by top management to train and develop leaders ‘The Copenhagen Fur Way’. It was only in fall 2014 that the Human Resource department started to introduce training programs for leaders. Søren Skriver stated, “*The company wanted to work with competence development in a more structured way in the future.*” (58-138). He further emphasized on how this topic is looked at from a top-down perspective; apparently Copenhagen Fur’s top management has realized the presence of an organizational gap concerning the absence of a leadership statement and is now considering possibilities to close this gap by thinking about how their leaders should lead.

Also Ditte Sorknæs and Brian Tufvesson confirmed that there is no sort of schooling or leadership training program in place at Copenhagen Fur. According to Tufvesson, *“A lot of things are up to the leader him- or herself to make sure that they do their job.”* He went further and openly criticized the top management and CEO, saying that he wished they would be clearer about what kind of qualities they want their leaders to have and how they want them to lead. In his opinion, if the company is to succeed in the long-run, there needs to be some sort of standard for leaders, some sort of definition of how they want leaders at Copenhagen Fur to be.

Ditte Sorknæs also stressed the lack of official leadership training programs and how leaders are more or less dependent on their gut feeling. However, she also emphasized on the fact that development opportunities are great if you ask for them. She recalled several occasions where she participated in training programs after she had asked for approval by her superior. In other words, employees have the opportunity to go on leadership training programs, but only if they ask for it.

Marlene Uttenthal particularly addressed her most recent experience with leadership training programs; in the beginning of October 2014 Søren Skriver organized a leadership workshop for twenty-six leaders from the production department in which Marlene Uttenthal also participated. As Skriver told me, he based the content of the workshop partially on the idea of leadership brand. However, he did not specify to which degree. Uttenthal later mentioned how the workshop had pre-decided elements, however, the participants were also asked beforehand about the kind of issues or topics they would like to be discussed during the program. According to Uttenthal, the workshop has been a success as she already experiences a change of behavior among her colleagues. However, whether or not the course was a proven success would become evident over time, she stated. In her opinion, the best training programs are not worth much without the necessary amount of follow-up.

Summing up, the leadership development opportunities are not extensive at Copenhagen Fur. Apparently the company has until recently had no official leadership training programs in place nor is there a clear statement about how the leaders at Copenhagen Fur should act and lead. Several interviewees have stated that it is very much up to the individual leaders to figure out how to lead. However, there has also been evidence for change in this area; Søren Skriver and his colleagues are working on introducing more training programs to the

company. Nonetheless, these training programs seem to be an initiative of the Human Resource department, rather than an official agenda by top management.

## **CUSTOMER FOCUS**

Kopenhagen Fur is an interesting case with regards to customer focus. As was elaborated on in chapter three (Theory), Kopenhagen Fur is the world's largest auction house for fur trade, which means that five times a year their direct customers, fur buyers and traders, are coming to Kopenhagen Fur's headquarter in Glostrup. Therefore, Kopenhagen Fur and its employees have a very different relationship to their customers than other companies, which was particularly highlighted by the interviewees' statements.

As a production manager, Marlene Uttenthal does not have any direct customer contact whatsoever. Nevertheless, the customer has a very high stand in production, as she explained: *"I don't think that there is a single employee who doesn't think about it [the customers] all the time."* (81-934). Especially in her department the customer needs to be at the heart of all operations, Uttenthal explained, because if the skins are sorted incorrectly the breeder loses money or the customer pays too much. Therefore, customer focus needs to be in all employees' awareness at all times in order to uphold the high quality standard that Kopenhagen Fur has placed upon itself.

Ditte Sorknæs emphasized especially on the close relationship the company has with its 800 to 1000 customers, *"We know their names, we know where they live, we know their dog's name!"* (94-1355). Interestingly, she pointed out that she does not think Kopenhagen Fur has much more of a customer focus than other companies, but quite the contrary. She explained how it actually is easier for Kopenhagen Fur to uphold this close relationship to customers due to the fact that they are physically in-house for five weeks of their year at the Kopenhagen Fur headquarter. Sorknæs further highlighted how the company goes to great lengths to accommodate their customers; they provide offices, a small shopping mal, and several different restaurants.

As Head of the Customer Department, Brian Tufvesson has a very close relationship to the customers in particular. Like his colleagues, he emphasized on the special relationship that

Kopenhagen Fur has to its customers, however, he also pointed out the delicateness of this unusual situation. He stated,

*“We have a closer relationship with our customers than a lot of other companies. It gives a lot of good aspects, but of course it’s a fine line; [...] you really have to be careful and not go too far in that aspect of friendship with your customers.” (67-472).*

In other words, while other companies might find themselves struggling to get closer to customers, Kopenhagen Fur needs to be careful not to get too close, and maintain a professional relationship. Tufvesson further stated that in order to maintain this professional relationship, the company has very strict rules and boundaries regarding their business conditions; transparency, as Tufvesson highlighted, is of utmost importance.

Summing up, the analysis has shown evidence of a high customer focus being present at Kopenhagen Fur. All interviewees emphasized on the special relationship that the company has with its customers as they are coming to headquarters five times a year. However, there has also been expression of Kopenhagen Fur actually having less customer focus than other companies due to this unusual situation. The customer focus becomes especially evident in the statements of Marlene Uttenthal regarding the stand of the customer in production. Without a doubt, Kopenhagen Fur is going at great lengths to accommodate their customers when in house, however, it is questionable whether this is more of a focus on service rather than actual customer focus in terms of.

## **KNOWLEDGE OF LEADERSHIP BRAND**

In the attempt of uncovering how the concept of branding can help companies develop their leadership into a company capability, I investigated to which extent the concept of leadership brand is known among Kopenhagen Fur employees.

During our initial meeting regarding our collaboration I introduced the concept of leadership brand to Søren Skriver; during our official interview he informed me that he had given this concept some thought and used it to build a leadership training workshop for twenty-six production managers. According to Skriver, there is good value in thinking about the company’s leadership brand. In his opinion, a company is always working with its leadership brand, whether they are aware of it or not. He further highlighted how he thinks leadership

brand is a good way of looking at the organization and defining ‘Are we what we want to be?’ and ‘What is our common platform, our way of leading our employees?’ In spite of his rather positive attitude towards leadership brand theory, Skriver also aired some criticism by stating that leaders in a company should not be made uniform, meaning the company should not attempt to produce identical leaders for all operations.

Brian Tufvesson, on the other hand, has not known about the term prior to the interview. His initial reaction and attitude towards it appeared to be less eager than Skriver’s. He stated that

*“When you say leadership branding, then it gets very interesting, because then basically the leadership [should] be more than just a leader, which for me is very strange. [...] I think a leader should not be the one showing off, or [...] being more than just a leader.”* (64-358).

He rounded off by saying that he cannot see himself applying this principle, as he cannot see himself be more than just himself. In this regard, he also mentioned how he does not believe in having idols or role models with regards to leadership.

Marlene Uttenthal, on the other hand, who had not heard about the term prior to the interview either, understood leadership brand rather different than Brian Tufvesson. She understood the concept as a way of communicating what kind of leadership Copenhagen Fur would like to stand for and highlighted how she views this as something that is in direct connection with the company values and what the company is known for. She summed up by stating that she could imagine an employee approaching his or her leader and letting them know if they were not living up to the leadership standard of the company, which indicates that she also views leadership brand as something that is defined by top management.

As previously mentioned, due to her work in the marketing department Ditte Sorknæs has a more extensive understanding of the term brand, which possibly gave her a better idea of what leadership brand is about; *“When we’re talking leadership branding I think about the style of leadership, what you’re expecting of a certain company.”* (91-1247). Here she clearly highlighted the outside-in view, namely what the outside expects of a company with regards to leadership. Sorknæs confirmed Skriver’s statement about all companies having a leadership brand, whether they are aware of it or not, by stating, *“we have [...] already a set idea about what it is like working at this company and that’s of course the leadership branding coming out of that company, because otherwise you [...] wouldn’t have formed this idea.”* (91-

1249). Here she also highlighted the aspect of how the company is perceived by potential employees. However, Sorknæs also sees difficulties with the concept; she pointed out how, in theory, relatively easy it is for top management to decide on a certain type of leadership brand and promote it to the outside world, however, the question is whether or not it is reflecting what is going on inside the company. In her opinion, the top management of Copenhagen Fur already has an idea of how leadership should be applied within the firm, though the leaders in different departments all have very different styles of leadership due to their different tasks, underlining the misalignment between top management's idea of how it should be and the employees' reality. Sorknæs rounded off by stating leadership brand is an interesting concept, but is, in her opinion, more difficult to embed in the company due to the different styles of leadership that leaders apply throughout the company.

Summing up, the analysis has indicated that the concept of leadership brand is not actively applied as an overall company approach. However, some interviewees have proven to have a good idea of what the concept is about. Despite Søren Skriver claim to use the concept for developing leadership-training programs, it became rather clear that Copenhagen Fur's leadership brand is not considered an strategic priority of the top management nor is it really known by employees.

# DISCUSSION

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In this chapter I will discuss the most interesting findings uncovered in the analysis as well as the company descriptions, and assess them against the theories described in chapter three. Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur will be discussed simultaneously according to the sub-questions described in the introduction:

1. How is the concept of branding understood at the case companies?
2. How is leadership understood at the case companies?
3. How extensive is the focus on customers?
4. Do the case companies show signs of leadership brand?

Each section will end with a sub-conclusion. By the end of this chapter the reader should have a good overview and understanding of the current leadership status of both companies.

## **BRANDING AT THE CASE COMPANIES**

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Understanding the terms brands and branding is essential for today's businesses, as the days of the traditional one-way communication between brands and the customers are over (Oosthuizen, 2010). It is no longer just up to the companies to decide what they want the audiences to know about the brand, as consumers and customers are much more aware of brands and are able to form and air their own opinions about the brand via new media (Oosthuizen, 2010). Therefore, the whole brand experience is of utmost importance as any negative experience can and will undermine the brand (Oosthuizen, 2010), confirming what Dunn and Davis (2004) pointed out, brands "*are a set of expectations and associations evoked from experiences with a company or product.*" (Dunn & Davis, 2004, p. 241).

The analysis of Rockwool Scandinavia has shown that all respondents understand the brand to be build from the inside, meaning that it is the company who decides what the audiences are to know about the brand. None of the interviewees considered the outside's perception and expectations.



Kopenhagen Fur, on the other hand, displayed a different view; here, branding is overall understood to be the way audiences perceive the company, both internally and externally. Two of the respondents mentioned brand to be what the company stands for, as well as being a matter of positioning. In other words, at Kopenhagen Fur brand and branding is both viewed in accordance with Dunn and Davis (2004), hence as a set of expectations and experiences the customer has with the brand, as well as Jones and Bonevac (2013), namely viewing brand as a definition of how wants to be perceived. However, I gained the impression that this understanding of brand and branding is not very extensive and build on theory, but rather on personal experience and hearsay.

Concluding, I believe that both views by Dunn and Davis, and Jones and Bonevac are relevant for today's businesses. A company should absolutely be clear about whom they are and what they want to stand for, but they also need to realize that how they are actually perceived by audiences is just as relevant. Kopenhagen Fur is already on a good path by thinking along the lines of Dunn and Davis (2004) and Ulrich and Smallwood (2007). Rockwool Scandinavia, on the other hand, is in need of updating their brand understanding and thus their understanding of themselves as a company. In better understanding their brand and the way they are perceived by the outside world both companies will be able to better align the departments throughout their organizations due to the common denominator that is the brand.

## **LEADERSHIP AT THE CASE COMPANIES**

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In this part of the discussion I will emphasize on different subjects regarding leadership, which came to light through the analysis. The following sections are divided into the topics of Leadership and Current Leadership Culture.

### **LEADERSHIP**

The analysis has shown that both Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur understand leadership to be in direct correlation with the individual leader; at the same time, different priorities were mentioned as being most important for a leader.

## LEADER VERSUS LEADERSHIP

In Rockwool Scandinavia good leadership was identified as highly individual, both depending on the leader and the employee. Kristian Dalhof described a situation with one of his former colleagues who ended up resigning, as he did not appreciate his boss's way of leading, while he, Dalhof, felt that the leadership style fit him very well (appendix 5.4). This story highlights the apparent standpoint at Rockwool Scandinavia, that it is difficult if not impossible to define good leadership as it depends on the individual people involved. At Kopenhagen Fur the interviewees indicated a clearer and more coherent view. All of the respondents focused on the individual leader as well when talking about leadership, however, here good leadership was first and foremost about developing people, and making sure they are happy and fulfilled with their work. Both companies showed a clear tendency to connect good leadership to the individual leader; while a leader certainly has to be able to lead other people, the concept of leadership, as emphasized by Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b), is and should stand in direct relation with the firm. A company may have many great individual leaders, but lack leadership. Kakabadse (2000) also emphasized that leadership needs to be connected to the company in the form of the company's ability to produce a leadership bench that delivers stakeholder confidence in future performance (Kakabadse, 2000; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). In other words, when talking about leadership one needs to focus on the company's capability and develop it instead of focusing entirely on the individual. This does not imply that the individual leader should not be groomed and developed, but focusing solely on developing the individual will result in a group of leaders who demonstrate a great variety of competences, but who are not focused enough on what is uniquely important to the company's external stakeholders and hence, the company. As was stated earlier in the brand section: the whole company experience influences the perception of the company, especially by external stakeholders; leadership is no exception.

While it is still important to have competent leaders, both companies need to realize that leadership is concerned with the firm's capability to produce leaders. Failing to do so means missing out on a valuable opportunity to develop a strong leadership bench and assure customers' and investors' confidence in future performance.

## LEADERSHIP STYLES

While the understanding of leadership should be evolved around the company, the individual leader still matters. As elaborated on in the theory chapter, there are many different ways in which a leader can approach his or her followers. The employees of Kopenhagen Fur displayed a clear tendency towards the servant leadership style; throughout the interviews it became clear that the employees of Kopenhagen Fur are considered the company's biggest resource. Especially in the production department the company is highly dependent on the skills and experience of their sorters. It was mentioned numerous times that developing employees, deciding on goals in cooperation, and supporting them is of utmost importance for a leader. All of these comments point towards servant leadership being present and preferred at Kopenhagen Fur. As it was highlighted in the theory chapter, servant leadership is considered to be very focused on the individual leader's characteristics, which raises the question whether or not these attributes can be learned or if they are simply inherent. Assuming the attributes of servant leadership can be learned, the question arises whether this is truly applicable in real life as the literature identified more than twenty different attributes which a leader would need to be competent in (Russel & Stone, 2002) to be considered an effective servant leader. On the other hand, assuming that these characteristics are inherent creates the problem of actually finding the right people who demonstrate competency in all of these. However, it is difficult to actually make a sound statement about the prevailing leadership style at Kopenhagen Fur, as I did not observe different leaders' leadership styles. Therefore, it is only possible to comment on the tendencies the four interviewees displayed during the interviews. Although I am not convinced about the concept of servant leadership itself, I agree that in a highly employee-dependent company like Kopenhagen Fur there should be a high focus on employee happiness and satisfaction that goes beyond a high salary.

Rockwool Scandinavia, on the other hand, did not present as clear a tendency towards one leadership style as Kopenhagen Fur. Some interviewees were unable to mention different attributes, as they believe the leadership style is highly dependent on the individual, while others emphasized on common attributes such as trust, respect, motivation and involvement. In order to make a proper and educated statement about the prevailing leadership style at Rockwool Scandinavia, another, more focused study would need to be conducted.

Although the literature is extensive with regards to different leadership styles, I am not convinced that developing or encouraging a certain leadership style within a company is the way to go. I agree that the way a leader leads his or her employees has a crucial influence on performance (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). However, I do not believe that anyone can or should adopt any given leadership style. This was also mentioned numerous times by both Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur employees; it was emphasized that a good leader should be able to adapt their way of leading to the different situations and people. This, however, I agree with only in part; I agree that different external circumstances demand different ways of leading (crisis, upswing, etc.), however, I personally do not believe that it is healthy or efficient for a leader to adapt his or her way of leading to the individual people, as treating and leading people differently could be regarded as not authentic.

In this regard, I believe the concept of branding is very much applicable to the individual person as well. Every individual has a personal brand, which is his or hers identity, reputation, and the way in which he or she is perceived by others (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007b). Therefore, companies should focus on the authenticity of their leaders and their compatibility with the firm brand rather than their ability to display and switch leadership styles. In other words, leaders still need to cover the fundamental elements of effective leadership, but the way in which these fundamentals, as well as the differentiators, are carried out should be driven by the leaders' own personality.

Concluding, Kopenhagen Fur showed tendencies towards servant leadership, while the analysis of Rockwool Scandinavia in this regard was inconclusive. Further and more extensive studies would need to be conducted in order to determine the actual ways and styles of leadership in the two companies.

## **CURRENT LEADERSHIP CULTURE**

The analysis of the current leadership culture brought very different and interesting findings to light in both Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur.

As described in chapter two, Rockwool Scandinavia has a very detailed Principle of Leadership program in place. This PL program is a comprehensive set of rules describing the hierarchy and how employees are to behave towards each other. In short, it states that every

employee can only have one manager who has the authority to delegate tasks. During the interviews it became clear that this PL program is very deeply rooted in three out of four interviewees, which is curious, because the employee who expressed some criticism towards this way of conducting leadership has been with the company for the shortest period of time. While his colleagues have been with the company between seven-and-a-half and fourteen-and-a-half years, Kristian Dalhof joined the company only two years ago. It seemed like he took on somewhat of an outsider's perspective; although he openly admits to be slightly biased as the company he previously worked for was an American company and very much focused on change management I find it very curious that none of the other interviewees have expressed more criticism towards the leadership culture at Rockwool. According to Dalhof, the PL program causes the responsibility to stay among higher ranking management; because the manager takes ultimate responsibility for his or her employees' actions, Dalhof stated, many employees do not think for themselves. As part of the Rockwool Way, the company promotes a culture of trust and empowerment; however, the PL program seems to contradict this drastically. For example, as can be seen in Appendix 2 (clause 16), the PL program clearly states that *"A manager should, in spite of his or her own opinion, be ready to change his [or her] point of view towards the employees in order to support the superior and promote common best interest."* In other words, although a manager opposes the opinion of his or her superior, he or she is obliged to pretend to agree with the superior in order to support a common interest. In my opinion, this statement is anything but trusting or empowering. Furthermore, it is curious that although this program is called Principles of Leadership, the terms leader or leadership are not used once. Instead, the program uses the terms 'managers', 'superiors', and 'employees'. If the hierarchy truly is followed as fiercely as it is described, I believe this way of conducting leadership is outdated. Although too much responsibility can be overwhelming and harmful as well, I believe that any employee, manager, and superior should take responsibility for his or her own actions and performance, in any situation.

At Kopenhagen Fur, on the other hand, a whole different issue became evident. As was mentioned in chapter two, it was confirmed by the employees there is no sort of leadership training or development program in place. Although Søren Skriver and his colleagues are working on implementing such programs at the moment, it is astonishing that in a company which houses the largest turnover of mink skin world wide and has a market share of 60%,

does not have any leadership training programs in place whatsoever. S indicated by several employees, there is such a vast difference between how leadership is conducted in the different departments that it is close to impossible to speak of a common leadership culture. In some departments, leaders are still practicing a form of top-down management while in others a more mixed approach is predominant. The only common thread I could ascertain was the focus on developing people, as previously described. Several employees have expressed a desire for a statement by top management clarifying what good leadership means at Kopenhagen Fur. As Søren Skriver further informed me, the current leadership training programs are following the wish of top management and thus focus on competence development.

Concluding, both companies have very different leadership cultures. While at Rockwool Scandinavia the way of leading is recorded in detail in the form of the PL program, Kopenhagen Fur appears to have no common recorded leadership culture at all; here, knowing how to lead and how to deal with employees is very much left to the individual leader, with no form of corporate guidance whatsoever. Both companies need to invest in reconsidering their strategies for how leadership is to be conducted throughout the company, as their current ways of doing so could have negative influence on future performance.

#### **MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

As becomes evident throughout chapter two, neither Kopenhagen Fur nor Rockwool Scandinavia have an appropriate way of measuring the effectiveness and success of leadership training programs in place. Rockwool Scandinavia does not have any exact way of measuring in place other than relying on the evaluation of managers and employees, and also Kopenhagen Fur relies heavily on the reports and evaluation of program participants. Considering the amount of money (DKK 1.5 million at Kopenhagen Fur), these ways of measuring the programs' effectiveness seems insufficient. According to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2008), and Ulrich and Smallwood (2001b), business leaders are interested in real, measurable results that show unmistakably whether the company has become better or not. More often than not companies focus on what is easy to measure, namely participant satisfaction etc., rather than what is right to measure, namely the actual effect of the programs on the business.

Although the goal of training programs is to strengthen the competences of individual leaders, relying on staff evaluations only is not sufficient enough. Furthermore, these measuring tools are even less sufficient when the intent of the program was to increase the quality of leadership within a company. A company employing competent leaders is not equivalent to great leadership being present at that company. Therefore, both Kopenhagen Fur and Rockwool Scandinavia should evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of their measurement tools and consider implementing new methods of measuring if they want to know the real value of their investments.

## **CUSTOMER FOCUS**

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Customer focus is a crucial idea behind leadership brand, therefore, it was important to examine and evaluate Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur's stance on the subject.

At Rockwool Scandinavia, all employees emphasized on the company's recent increase on customer focus; Marina Mazin mentioned an incident from a year ago, which apparently exposed the company's lack on customer focus. As a result, a customer-orientation program was introduced in fall 2013 (Rockwool Scandinavia, 2014b). Although this program was meant to increase the solidarity and motivation among employees the interviews have revealed indications of this focus not being fully aligned. Marina Mazin even questioned the degree to which a company should focus on their customers, as she was convinced that just giving the customers what they want could have negative results (Appendix 5.3). Although I understand what Mazin pointed towards I do not agree; "*Customers are the lifeblood of any organization*" as (Mirza, 2012) pointed out, therefore any company activity should always have customers' needs and expectations in mind.

Furthermore, Kristian Dalhof emphasized that the results of customer surveys are not properly communicated throughout the company. In that sense, there seems to be a misalignment between top management's intentions and the actual execution of the customer orientation program. The most extensively conducted surveys are not worth anything if the results and implications are not communicated to all parts of the organization. Communicating these results properly is crucial in order to evoke any change in behavior and

thinking among the employees. No one can get better at what they do unless they know in which areas to improve and how.

At Kopenhagen Fur, on the other hand, the relationship to customers is quite special; five times a year fur buyers from all over the world travel to the Kopenhagen Fur headquarters to participate in the auctions. As several employees informed me the company goes to great lengths to accommodate its customers during these weeks. Although the customers are directly in house and Kopenhagen Fur has a much more personal relationship to them than other companies, it is questionable whether there truly is a focus on customers present or not. From the interviews and the analysis it became clear that only in production there appears to be a customer focus the way that leadership brand focuses on it. Marlene Uttenthal stated that although employees working in production do not have direct contact with the customers are always in their awareness. Due to the delicateness of their job, it is crucial for the production that employees are able to see their work from the customers' point of view. As Uttenthal highlighted, If the skins are not sorted correctly the breeder either loses money or the customer pays too much for lower quality. In this sense, there is a great emphasis on customer focus at Kopenhagen Fur, however, other than in production it is questionable whether or the company is operating with focus on the customer or if the focus is more on customer service.

Concluding, it has become evident that, on the surface, both companies seem to have a large focus on customers. However, in none of the companies this customer focus appeared to be fully executed and aligned throughout all levels of the organization. Customer satisfaction surveys and arrange for customer comfort is not equal to a true focus on customers; as Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) pointed out, real customer focus is about placing customer perceptions, expectations, and experiences at the heart of any employee behavior and decision making process.



## **LEADERSHIP BRAND**

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### **KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONCEPT**

Ulrich and Smallwood first defined leadership brand in 2007, and thus I did not have high expectations for the concept to be known by Rockwool Scandinavia and Copenhagen Fur employees. It came as no surprise that most of the interviewees had never heard of the concept before; however, both at Copenhagen Fur and Rockwool Scandinavia one or two employees did know about the concept, and some of the remaining interviewees came up with decent suggestions.

Although the interviewees had never heard about the concept of leadership brand before, Klaus Hovmøller, Marina Mazin, and Rikke Præstmark all suggested in one way or another that it is about aligning the company. Marina Mazin probably came closest to the actual idea behind leadership brand by stating that she wants her employees to reflect what Rockwool Scandinavia is considered to be: trustworthy, technical, and reliable. Only Kristian Dalhof, who has previously worked in a marketing company, had heard about the term before, and mentioned GE as an example. Although he appeared to have a positive attitude towards the concept at first, he aired some criticism. To Dalhof, leadership is very closely related to the individual leader and a leadership brand is therefore difficult to obtain as it varies depending on the leader. Also, he questioned the applicability of leadership brand because it takes a long time and effort to align people and get them to work in the same way. These statements indicate that Dalhof has not fully understood the concept; although it is a way of doing business, as he states, it is not something that is implemented, but rather something a company chooses to strategically work with. Furthermore, the individual leader is of course important for the overall company leadership brand, however, the company's leadership brand is not to be confused with the personal leadership brand of the individual leader. The company's leadership brand and the individual's leadership brand need to be compatible, otherwise both would risk losing credibility (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2008). Moreover any attempt to align the company takes time; as Skip Bowman, managing director of Global Mindset, mentioned in our interview (Appendix 7), carrying out a new leadership strategy takes about four years. Therefore, the time factor should not be an argument against working with leadership brand, if one is serious about working with it.

At Kopenhagen Fur, on the other hand, leadership brand was slightly more known than at Rockwool Scandinavia. Both Søren Skriver and Ditte Sorknæs appeared to have some knowledge on the concept; however, both Skriver and Sorknæs also expressed some criticism. Like Dalhof from Rockwool Scandinavia, Skriver sees a problem with making leaders uniform, regardless of their personality or of whom they lead. Again, this way of thinking is beside the point. Leadership brand is not about producing one specific kind of leader; it is about assuring that all leaders throughout the organization demonstrate competence in the fundamentals of leadership as well as the unique qualities that customers and investors deem important. How the individual leader demonstrates competence in these areas is ultimately up to the individual leader and is not restricted to one type of personality.

Ditte Sorknæs also criticized the concept of leadership brand by stating that it would be too easy for top management to decide on how they want to brand the company, without necessarily reflecting on what is going on inside the company. Again, this understanding is not quite to the point. Leadership brand is not something that top management just decides to implement, but working with your leadership brand means a strategic and active commitment to aligning the company's leadership capability throughout the organization. Top management needs to make a determined decision and lead by example. If top management does not fully live up to the criteria, then why should the employees? In other words, the decision to work with the company's leadership brand and aligning the company accordingly needs to come from the top and be reach through all levels of the organization.

Concluding this section, although only few of the interviewees appeared to have heard about the concept of leadership before there appeared to be some misconceptions about it. Every company has a leadership brand, whether they are aware of it or not. Therefore, the idea of leadership brand is not something that can be implemented over night, but something that top management chooses to strategically work with. Furthermore, leadership brand is not about making all leaders within the organization uniform, but about implementing processes that create and develop leaders to become competent in leadership fundamentals as well as the competences customers and investors care about.

## **SIGNS OF LEADERSHIP BRAND**

Overall it can be concluded that neither Rockwool Scandinavia nor Copenhagen Fur are strategically working with their leadership brand in the way that Ulrich and Smallwood (2007) have described the concept. However, both companies have shown signs of thinking along the lines of leadership brand without actively realizing it.

With regards to branding, Copenhagen Fur's view on the concept appeared to go along the works of Dunn and Davis (2004) and Jones and Bonevac (2007); employees took both the inside-out and the outside-in view into consideration. However, in order to achieve better alignment, especially with regards to customer focus, the company needs to extend the knowledge and significance of the concept for the company throughout the entire organization. Rockwool Scandinavia, however, appeared to have a very singular view on branding; here, the employees only considered the inside-out view, namely what the company wants to communicate to the outside, instead of taking the outside's perception and expectation into consideration as well.

With regards to leadership, however, Rockwool Scandinavia showed more evidence of working with their leadership brand than Copenhagen Fur, although they are not aware of it. The way Rockwool Scandinavia has collected its different elements of leadership into The Rockwool Way, as well as the Principles of Leadership program and the renewed focus on customers, are indicators for Rockwool Scandinavia attempting to work with their 'leadership brand', although not based on the works of Ulrich and Smallwood. It appears, however, that this change in strategy is not executed well enough. The four employees knew about some of the different elements, but seemed not very confident when talking about them, as if they were unsure whether what they were declaring was in accordance with the official Rockwool Scandinavia statement. My personal impression is that although the change in company strategy has only started in 2010, there are too many elements that employees need to keep track of to fully understand the new strategy and way of conducting leadership.

Although Copenhagen Fur did not appear to have a distinct leadership culture like Rockwool Scandinavia, they also showed small signs of leadership brand, especially with regards to customer focus. At Rockwool Scandinavia no one appeared to understand customer focus as perceiving the company from the customers' perspective in terms of values and experiences, but rather as a means of enhancing product development and innovation. At Copenhagen Fur,

on the other hand, it became very clear that especially in production, the focus on customers is very similar to the way Ulrich and Smallwood (2007) have described it. Here, employees as well as leaders seem to really try to take an outside's perspective and keep in mind how the result of their work will affect the customers and breeders.

Finally, leadership brand is also highly concerned with developing a strong leadership bench, hence, future generations of leaders who are capable of leading the company to future success by excellently demonstrating competence in the leadership fundamentals as well as the company specific unique qualities that customers and investors value and care about. In this regard, Rockwool Scandinavia appeared to be more on the path towards leadership brand than Kopenhagen Fur, as they already have development and training programs for leaders in place that are targeted at teaching and reinforcing the Rockwool Way of leading, whereas Kopenhagen Fur appears to only be in the beginning of implementing training programs for leaders. Nevertheless, implementing extensive training programs is not very sensible unless you know how effective they are in adding true value to the company and its stakeholders. Although both Kopenhagen Fur and Rockwool Scandinavia have ways of measuring the effectiveness of their training programs in place it became evident that these methods are not sufficient enough, according to theory.

Summing up, although neither Kopenhagen Fur nor Rockwool Scandinavia are strategically working with their leadership brand they show small signs of it. However, I believe that both companies have the potential to gain high value for their company if they choose to strategically work with their leadership brand.

# CONCLUSION

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Throughout the process of writing this project one thing has become particularly clear to me: leadership matters. I used to believe that great leadership is about great people who have this certain ‘something’, who were born to be great leaders. As it turns out, I was wrong. While I still believe that the individual leader is of utmost importance to his or her direct employees I have come to realize that great leadership is more than what great leaders do; it is about the company that forms and nurtures great leaders.

In my attempt to find a topic that includes and combines both the topic of branding and leadership I came across the concept of leadership brand. Working strategically with leadership brand means to bridge the outside’s perceptions and expectations with the inside’s behavior through leadership activities. Thinking along the leadership brand way moves the customers’ perceptions of and experiences with the firm to the heart of employee behavior and decision-making processes. The overall goal of this project was to answer the following research question:

*How could the concept of leadership brand help companies develop their leadership into a company capability?*

Every company has a leadership brand, the question is simply whether they have chosen to strategically work with it or not. In order to answer the research question, as well as the four sub-questions, case studies have been conducted on Rockwool Scandinavia and Copenhagen Fur, respectively. These case studies have shown that the concept of leadership brand is not actively applied in these firms nor was extensive knowledge on the concept present. Nevertheless, the case studies have provided some interesting insights into the attitudes towards and conduction of leadership in two world-leading companies.

The whole concept of leadership brand is built on the idea that the metaphor of brand can help companies move their understanding of leadership from the inside-out to the outside-in approach. Many, if not most companies focus on what is going on inside the company and the individual leader rather than what is going on outside. Hence, when it comes to leadership,

the focus has been on leaders' competences rather than the capability of a firm to produce competent leaders who deliver value to those who are affected by the outcome of their leadership efforts, namely the customers. Branding, like leadership, can be looked at from two angles: how the customers (the outside) perceive and experience the brand, and how the company (the inside) wants themselves, thus the brand, to be perceived and experienced. Both views are relevant, however, it is the outsiders' view that can make or break the brand today. Therefore, the outsiders' perceptions and experiences are to be taken into serious account. At Kopenhagen Fur the employees already displayed a view on branding that is in line with the works of Dunn and Davis (2004) and Jones and Bonevac (2007); however at Rockwool Scandinavia the employees appeared to have an outdated understanding of the concept. It became clear that branding at Rockwool Scandinavia is solely about how the company wants to brand itself without taking the outside's perceptions and experiences into consideration. This attitude towards branding can become a severe obstacle in the attempt of aligning the company in terms of self-awareness and communication with the outside world.

Furthermore, it turned out that both at Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur leadership is directly related to the individual leader instead of the companies' capability to produce effective leaders. Accordingly, when talking about the leadership capability of individuals the interviewees of both firms emphasized on highly generic competences such as vision, motivation, and inspiration instead of the fundamentals of effective leadership and the unique qualities which their respective customers truly care about. Focusing only on the individual leader instead of the company's capability to produce leaders and thereby strengthening the leadership bench could potentially weaken investors' and customers' faith in future success. Working strategically with leadership brand could help both Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur to change their view on leadership and begin to consider it a company capability rather than an individual's capability.

The companies very much differed with regards to their current leadership culture and focus on customers. Although Rockwool Scandinavia tries to promote a culture of trust and empowerment, as they state themselves, the Principles of Leadership program does not particularly foster trust or empowerment. The PL program underlines that Rockwool Scandinavia is in need of updating their understanding of leadership and what it means to be a leader. Kopenhagen Fur, on the other hand, did not appear to have a common leadership

culture at all. The interviewees described the company as divided as every department seems to have its own way of conducting leadership. Also, unlike Rockwool Scandinavia, which has an extensive offering of training programs, Kopenhagen Fur has not had a single leadership-training program. The interviewees confirmed that until recently it was completely up to the individual leader to figure out how to lead a group of employees.

With regards to customer focus, it became evident that neither Rockwool Scandinavia nor Kopenhagen Fur really displayed a focus on their customers as leadership brand suggests. Customer focus is, as mentioned above, about understanding how key customers view the company and placing this perception and experience at the heart of any employee behavior. Also, despite best intentions neither company appeared to have a common understanding of customer focus throughout all levels of the organization.

By conducting this project I have come to the overall conclusion that working with leadership brand enables companies to connect their corporate brand with customer and investor expectations, and employee behavior through company specific leadership. Thinking of leadership as a company capability and focusing on the processes that develop excellent leaders could help create a sustainable leadership culture that endures the test of time.

Through the analysis and discussion it has become clear to me that both Kopenhagen Fur and Rockwool Scandinavia show small signs of thinking along the lines of leadership brand, although it is not actively practiced. Both companies need to rethink their way of conducting leadership and focus on developing leaders who not only fulfill the leadership fundamental, but also live up to the expectations of customers and investors. Thinking the along the lines of leadership brand would empower these companies far beyond any adaption of certain leadership styles as it would move the focus to what is truly important. Within the umbrella of the corporate brand, leadership brand could help companies develop their leadership into a company capability by producing a competent leadership bench and thereby assuring customers' and investors' faith in future performance.

# FUTURE RESEARCH

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Due to the factor of time and space, this project could only investigate a small portion of a larger research area. In this case I have chosen to look into the way Rockwool Scandinavia and Copenhagen Fur currently understand and conduct leadership, however, my research has also let me come across other research areas, which would be interesting to elaborate on in future research.

With more time and resources it could be interesting to conduct a more extensive research on the actual leadership brands of not only Rockwool Scandinavia and Copenhagen Fur, but also other companies from other industries. Although neither company is strategically working with their leadership it would be intriguing to investigate how the companies are actually perceived by their best customers and whether or not the companies produce leaders who live up to these expectations. In this regard, it would also be necessary to take a closer look at the leadership training and development programs, as well as their way of measuring as it has become clear that the current programs and measurement tools are insufficient. The current research is based on company and employee opinions alone, therefore a more thorough research would assist in gaining a clearer idea of the actual quality of these programs.

Furthermore, a more thorough research on the actual prevailing leadership styles within the two companies is needed. Understanding which leadership philosophies the leaders in different departments follow could give deeper insights into the actual strengths and shortcomings of leaders and hence the leadership brand of the particular firm.

Lastly, it could be interesting to take a closer look at the individual leaders of the organizations and assess the female leader brands against the male leader brands. Males and females are said to have very different ways of leading employees; in this sense it would be interesting to investigate if and how this affects the employees' behaviors, and which group is more successful in displaying effectiveness in the leadership fundamentals and the unique qualities their key customers care about.



# METHODOLOGY

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In this chapter I will describe and explain the research philosophies and methodological choices I have undertaken in order to answer the research question of this project. First, the different research philosophies will be explained and reflected upon; then, the research design and methods will be highlighted; next, the data collection methods are clarified; and finally, the selection of case companies will be elaborated on.

## **RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

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At any stage of any research we make assumptions. These assumptions naturally influence the way we interpret and understand the findings we encounter during our research. The philosophical and methodological choices I have taken can be understood as my assumption about the way in which I view the world and thus, my research. These choices have significant influence on the way this research was conducted and how the data and findings were interpreted.

## **ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY**

Simply stated, ontology is concerned with the researcher's view on the nature of reality, while epistemology is concerned with the best ways of enquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). Understanding one's ontological and epistemological standpoint is important in order to understand which designs are useful for the study and which are not. For this paper, I deemed the position of relativism to be most sensible. While realism is about discovering single truths and nominalism is arguing that there is no truth at all, relativism is arguing for the existence of many truths depending on the individual who observes these "truths". Scientific truths are not simply out there to be discovered, but are created by people (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Considering the scope of this project the position of relativism is most applicable as this allows me to understand and interpret the responses of the interviewees in a meaningful way that can be acknowledged as

being true. This approach allows me to accept that there are many valuable views and opinions about what is good leadership, which can help me get closer to the answer. However, this also incorporates that another researcher, with another view and another methodology might reach another conclusion.

The epistemological standpoint of this paper is based on the position of social constructionism/interpretivism. This can be understood as a natural extension of realism; in social constructionism “*reality is not objective and exterior, but socially constructed and given meaning by people*” (Kvale, 2007). The focus is on what people are thinking and feeling and what they make of a given situation. The concept of leadership can be argued to be a socially constructed phenomenon, which only exists because people give meaning to it. Taking on the social constructionist/interpretivist viewpoint for this paper allows me to investigate and explore the deeper meanings of the interviewees’ responses; it allows me to keep an open mind and allows for the possibility of a change in direction.

## **AXIOLOGY**

Axiology is the branch of philosophy that studies judgment about value (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). It takes up the stance that the personal values of the researcher have significant influence on the research process as well as the credibility of results. Heron (1996, p. 139; in Saunders et al., 2012) argued, “[...] *values are the guiding reason of all human action*”. My beliefs and convictions have already carried weight when I had to choose the topic for this project. All views are inevitably an expression of my values and attitudes towards the topic and will unavoidably have an influence on the results, especially due to the interpretivist point of view that I have chosen to follow. It is important to note that this standpoint makes it very difficult for other researchers to replicate this project and come up with the exact same conclusion. Other researchers might produce other projects that could support or reject my results, however, the inability to replicating this research one-to-one does not implicate that this research and its outcome are invalid. It simply means that this is one of many possible ways to go about this topic. (Saunders et al., 2012).

## **RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS**

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In this section I will highlight and evaluate the chosen research design and methods for this project, such as different research approaches; qualitative research; and case study research. In the Empirical Data section you will find a more detailed description of the specific interview methods and tools used for this project, which I chose to place in a separate section due to its considerable importance for this project.

### **INDUCTION, DEDUCTION, ABDUCTION**

The way I decided to use theories for this project has significant influence on the research design. Generally, there are three different approaches to the use of theory in research projects: the inductive, deductive, and abductive approach.

The deductive approach is concerned with testing theory; the data collection is used to either falsify or verify the propositions of the theory. In other words, the research takes its point of departure in existing theory and moves on to test whether or not the theory actually holds true for the chosen research cases (Saunders et al., 2012). With an inductive approach, on the other hand, the data is collected first in order to explore a phenomenon, identifying themes etc. and generate a new theory (Saunders et al., 2012). When the newly generated theory, then, is tested through additional data collection, the abductive approach is used; hence, abduction is the combination of both the deductive and inductive approach.

For this project, it was not clear at first which approach I should follow and which approach I actually did follow. My research began with an interest in the subjects of leadership and branding and led to a personal desire to somehow combine these subjects. This further led me through a vast amount of literature until I eventually discovered the theory of leadership brand by Ulrich and Smallwood (2007b) and decided to use it as a core theory for my project. Everything that followed was influenced by this theory and I ultimately decided to apply it as my main theory and test whether or not this way of conducting leadership is being applied in the case companies. All of this speaks for the deductive approach, however, this project is also about getting a feeling of what is going on and gaining a better understanding of the leadership cultures in the chosen case companies (Saunders et al., 2012), which speaks for an inductive approach.

While the beginning of my research matches the deductive approach, the inductive approach is more in accordance with the research category (social science) of this project it would be obvious to conclude that the appropriate research approach for this project is abduction. However, this approach does not perfectly fit the design of this study either. Although an abductive approach characteristically moves back and forth between induction and deduction (Suddaby, 2006 in Saunders et al., 2012) I do not deem it applicable to this research as it is more suitable for a long term study. Applying an abductive approach aims at creating a conceptual framework, hence building theory and testing this theory again through further data collection. Therefore, this approach is beyond the scope of this project.

Through this evaluation of the different research approaches I have come to the conclusion that the deductive approach is the most applicable as the overall goal of this research project is to answer the research question by falsifying or verifying the applicability of the leadership brand theory. Nevertheless, this project also follows the inductive approach in the sense that it was my intention to gain insight into the leadership cultures of the case companies through the personal views and opinions of the interviewed employees. Therefore, the deductive approach is to be understood as the leading research approach of this project, while the inductive approach should be understood to be complementary rather than leading.

## **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

First of all, this is a qualitative research, which is often associated with an interpretivist philosophy; the objective with a qualitative research is to produce factual descriptions based on face-to-face knowledge of individuals in their social settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, in Saunders et al., 2012). In other words, it is the aim of the qualitative research to gain in-depth knowledge of the personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the research subjects through qualitative data, in this case interviews. I chose this research method as I wanted to know about the research subjects' personal thoughts and meanings. A quantitative approach also has its advantages, however, in this case I wanted to know the personal description of the interviewees about the leadership culture in their company, which is why I deemed the qualitative approach the most appropriate.

## CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Additionally, this is also a case study research. According to Yin (2009, in Farquhar, 2012) “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Farquhar, 2012; p. 5). In other words, a case study research is about gaining an understanding of something that is going on right now, right where it is going on. In this case it is about exposing the current leadership culture and the further development of such in the chosen case companies. It is about explaining, describing, illustrating, and enlightening the research topic (Yin, 2009, in Farquhar, 2012). Although this method has already been adopted by a vast number of researchers there remains some criticism and misunderstanding about this method. Some of the most common misunderstandings are:

- 1) Theoretical (context independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.
- 2) One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
- 3) The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.
- 4) The case study contains a bias towards verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.
- 5) It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

In his article “Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research” from 2006 Flyvberg one by one confutes and revises the statements above; in the following section I will give an overview of his arguments in order to clarify why the case study research is a valid method for producing knowledge and to underline the validity of this method for this research.

In order to confute the first misunderstanding, Flyvberg (2006) argues, “*Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals*” (p. 224). This argument is based on two convictions; first, he argues that case studies and therefore content-dependent knowledge are necessary, if not essential, in order to develop from a rule-based beginner to an expert level. For example, in a teaching situation

case studies more than often play a crucial role in order for the students to understand the principles taught and to gain a more extensive understanding of such, whereas without the case study the students would stay at their level and never develop further from a beginner's level (Flyvberg, 2006). Second, Flyvberg argues that there does not exist any predictive theory in social sciences. Case studies are a valid method of research "*not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!*" (Eysenck, 1976; in Flyvberg, 2006, p. 224). This distinction between proving something and learning something is indispensable as it is very difficult to generate "truth" or context-independent knowledge in social science, whereas learning is very much possible if not inevitable.

Flyvberg (2006) overthrows the second misunderstanding, that you cannot generalize from individual case studies and that the case study cannot contribute to scientific development, by arguing the following:

*"One can often generalize on the basis of a singular case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas "the force of example" is underestimated."* (p. 228)

In other words, it is highly dependent on the kind of case you choose to generalize from; the choice of method should also clearly depend on the problem and its situation (Flyvberg, 2006). He also mentions the applicability of Karl Popper's theory of falsification; Popper used the example of 'all swans are white' and how the observation of just one single black swan would falsify this truth and stimulate further research and new theory building. Hence, case studies are an excellent way of identifying 'black swans', due to their in-depth approach; case studies are, therefore, well suited to widen generalizations (swans are white or black) and to contribute to existing knowledge, as well as stimulate further research (Flyvberg, 2006).

The third misunderstanding, that case studies are best suited for generating hypotheses, is based on the second misunderstanding and due to his conclusion on this Flyvberg (2006) overthrew the third misunderstanding and wrote, "*The case study is useful for both generating and testing hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone.*" (p. 229) Flyvberg (2006) especially stresses the importance of how to collect cases; he argues that

*"When the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given*

*problem or phenomenon, a representative case or random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. [...] Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied.” (p. 229)*

In other words, the degree to which a case is or is not generalizable is highly dependent on the case itself; therefore, a generalization about the non-generalization of case studies is inadequate. With regards to whether or not the case study method is most useful for generating hypotheses rather than testing them, again, it highly depends on the case and not the method itself.

The fourth misunderstanding, that the researcher has a bias towards verification, Flyvberg (2006) tackles as follows:

*“The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher’s preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than towards verification.” (p. 237)*

Frankly, the question of bias and subjectivism is applicable to all methods, not just the case study method. Also, one must assume that the goal of the research is to gain new insights into a given problem or phenomenon, hence the research is simply a form of learning (Flyvberg, 2006). Again, it is highly dependent on the case and for who and what purpose the research is conducted, however, this is a question that should be applied to all researches, not only the case study.

Finally, the fifth misunderstanding, that it is difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies, is revised as follows:

*“It is correct that summarizing case studies is often difficult [...]. It is less correct as regards case outcomes. The problem in summarizing case studies, however, are due to the properties of the reality studied than to the case study as a research method. Often it is not desirable to summarize and generalize case studies. Good studies should be read as narrative in their entirety.” (p. 241)*

With regards to this misunderstanding, one might rather consider case studies as case stories as they often contain a great deal of narrative. The critics of case study research probably fancy concrete structure and like research to be summed-up or closed; that is not always

possible with the case study as every narrative, every story has rich and versatile facets that it might not always be desirable to summarize the experiences on a few main results (Flyvberg, 2006). That being said, this particular project does close with a conclusion as the main purpose of this thesis is to answer the stated research question; the case studies were conducted in an attempt to answer the research question in the best possible way, hence, with primary data. However, the case study method as such is used as a tool rather than being the objective itself.

Concluding this section, the case study method has its pro's and con's, like any research method, and it is important to understand and evaluate the context in which the case study research method is applied. In this case, it is highly relevant as it granted me access to primary data through deeper insights into the prevailing leadership culture in the case companies.

## **EMPIRICAL DATA**

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The data collected for this paper consists primarily of qualitative data from eight semi-structured interviews with business managers from Rockwool Scandinavia and Copenhagen Fur, as well as one semi-structured interview with Skip Bowman, managing director of the consultancy Global Mindset (appendix B). The interview with Bowman was conducted in order to gain some background information on the status of leadership development in the Danish context.

### **INTERVIEWS**

The interviews were conducted in September and October 2014 at the Copenhagen offices of the companies and lasted between 22 and 57 minutes. Further details on the interviewees and quality of the interviews will be elaborated on in the sections below.

Using interviews as the main method of data-collection is applicable in this project as the overall aim of qualitative interviews is to gain an understanding of the respondents' point of view and why they have this particular perspective (King, 2004 in Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). The objective of this project is to get a good insight into the respondents' views on and feelings towards leadership and leadership development within their company, respectively, in order to gain a better understanding of these.



I chose to go forward with the semi-structured interview, as it is more structured than a regular everyday conversation, but less structured and more open than questionnaires. I tried to ask the different respondents the same questions, however, whenever I felt that the interview was going into an interesting direction I followed this development instead of stubbornly sticking to my interview-guide. The advantage of this method is that it allowed me to gain a deeper insight into the respondent's point of view and I believe it also established more trust between the respondent and me, which resulted in more honest answers. The possibility of a bias from both parties, however, is always a serious concern, which will be further discussed in the sections below.

The interviews were planned and executed according to the seven stages of interviewing: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, and reporting (Kvale, 2007). The themes of my interview are rooted in the objective of this paper, namely to gain an overview of the current ways of conducting and development leadership in the two companies. Furthermore, the themes are also influenced by the theory of leadership brand. I conducted the interviews with the prospect of finding indicators for this theory being applied in the selected case companies. Naturally, intensive reading on the subject of leadership helped me to gain a broader understanding of the topic and hence influenced the development of themes as well.

After having developed an idea of the interview themes I decided that the most sensible choice of interview design for this project is the problem-oriented semi-structured interview. It allowed me to formulate some relevant questions and still allowed for the conversation to run smoothly. Furthermore, I realized that I could not possibly foresee all possible directions that the interview could go towards and the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to follow any interesting paths and did not force me to stick to my interview guide (Kvale, 2007).

The interviews were planned to last about 30 – 45 minutes, but in some cases, due to the exploratory nature of the interview, it took up to 60 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded in order to allow proper verbatim transcription and analysis (Kvale, 2007). In order to figure out the current state of leadership in the case companies I needed the interviewees to know as little as possible about the leadership theories and models that I had in mind when creating my interview guide in order to get as much of a 'real life picture' as possible. This

strategy has led to curiosity and possibly a hint of anxiety and insecurity, which I tried to resolve with a short briefing about my research and its purpose before turning on the voice memo and starting the interview.

Additionally, part of the data for this project is secondary, qualitative data in the form of articles from academic and business journals, which were derived from databases such as LibSearch (CBS library), Business Source Complete, and Emerald Insight. This secondary data has contributed to the structure of the interview guide as well as the theoretical discussions of the interview findings. Furthermore, Rockwool Scandinavia provided company material on their leadership culture and development programs. Unfortunately, Kopenhagen Fur was not able to provide such materials.

## **INTERVIEW QUALITY**

This section deals particularly with the quality of the interviews and hence the obtained data, reviewing the interviewer and interviewee qualifications, the validity of the interviews, and possible biases of the interviewer and interviewees.

With regards to the quality of the interview, Kvale (2007) mentions six crucial factors, which are displayed below.

- The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee.
- The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subjects' answers, the better.
- The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers.
- To a large extent the interview is interpreted throughout the interview.
- The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers in the course of the interview.
- The interview is 'self-reported'; it is a self-reliant story that hardly requires extra explanations.

One of the first indicators Kvale (2007) mentions regarding the quality of an interview is the interview length. He states that

*“Current research interviews are often too long and filled with idle chatter. If one knows what to ask for, why one is asking, and how to ask, one can conduct short interviews that are rich in*

*meaning.*" (p. 79)

Compared to the seven-line interview, which Kvale (2007) uses as an example, the length of the interviews for this study is rather excessive. However, in my opinion the length of 30 minutes to an hour is acceptable and does not affect the quality of the data collected in a negative way for several reasons: first of all, the interviewee needs some time to get comfortable when opening up and sharing their honest thoughts and opinions with a complete stranger; even for an experienced interviewer it will prove difficult to obtain the rich data he or she is looking for without a warm-up phase (Kvale, 2007).

Then, the length of an interview also highly depends on the answers that are given by the interviewees. This requires that the interviewee knows exactly how to answer the given question without a second thought. Unfortunately that is rarely the case; especially due to the fact that the interviewees were not given much information on beforehand in order to avoid prepared answers, as the goal was to obtain spontaneous, honest, top-of-mind answers. When confronted with unexpected questions I believe one needs time to process the question and think about the answer. Also, I frequently experienced that while answering the given question in one way the interviewees sometimes changed their minds mid-answering and went into a different direction, which again increased the length of the interview. Naturally, there are different ideal lengths for interviews with different purposes (Kvale, 2007); the previously specified length of the interviews conducted for this study is appropriate as it gave the interviewee time to produce rich data. However, it also needs to be emphasized that the differences in interview lengths (22 to 60 minutes) speak towards differences in quality. Longer interviews have produced more rich data than the shorter interview. However, in conclusion, the length of the conducted interviews is considered to be appropriate for this type of project.

Furthermore, as one can see from the transcripts in Appendixes 5 to 7, the answers are rich, spontaneous, and relevant; my questions were short and the interviewees' responses relatively long. I followed up on statements to clarify and verify the meaning of the answers to the best of my abilities. Considering that I am not a trained expert in conducting interviews the quality of interviews has varied, naturally. However, with every interview I learned more about the process and improved from interview to interview. This, though, is not to be understood as a degradation of the conducted interviews. I am confident that despite my lack

of experience the interviews are appropriate for this project, and variations in quality should be understood as part of a successful learning process rather than a degradation.

Furthermore, the fact that the interview language was English while the interviewees' native language is Danish might have led to some errors and difficulties in expression and delivery of meaning from the interviewee. However, it is crucial to note that all interviewees except one spoke a highly professional English with an extensive vocabulary and can be called business fluent. In one case, however, the interviewee did not feel comfortable enough and experienced difficulties to get her point across, which is why we changed the interview language to Danish. This bears the consequence that when this interviewee is quoted in the paper the quote will be in English and hence some of the meaning could possibly have become lost in translation, as I am not a professional translator.

Lastly, the quality of the interviews not only differs with regards to content; transcribing the interviews also presents a number of different sources for errors. Occasional technical difficulties such as the interviewee speaking too low or with a difficult accent have caused problems during the transcription process and may therefore have had a slightly negative influence on the quality.

However, I am fully aware of these shortcomings as well as my lack of experience, yet when put into perspective I am convinced that the quality of the interviews, transcriptions, and the data derived therefrom is acceptable, valid, and consistent for this project.

## **INTERVIEWEES**

The interviewees for this project are four middle and senior managers from Rockwool Scandinavia and four middle managers from Kopenhagen Fur, respectively. In the table below you will find an overview of the respective interviewees and their position in the case companies. The group comprehends of four women and four men, approximately between the ages of 30 and 60 years. Considering the small size of the group this almost equal distribution of gender makes the group quite homogeneous.

**Table 2: List of Interviewees**

Company	Name	Position
Rockwool Scandinavia	Rikke Præstmark	Head of HR
Rockwool Scandinavia	Klaus Hovmøller	Technical Director
Rockwool Scandinavia	Marina Mazin	Technical Manager
Rockwool Scandinavia	Kristian Dalhof	Finance Manager
Kopenhagen Fur	Søren Skriver	HR Manager
Kopenhagen Fur	Brian Tufvesson	Head of Customer Department
Kopenhagen Fur	Marlene Uttenthal	Production Manager
Kopenhagen Fur	Ditte Sorknæs	PR and Marketing Communication Manager

As mentioned previously, the interviews varied in length and content from individual to individual; some interviewees were more open to the experience and to answering the questions honestly and extensively. It is important to emphasize that the interviewees were asked to answer the given questions in accordance with their personal, subjective opinions. Therefore, a potential bias cannot be ruled out. The interviewees are influenced through their employment and the culture of the respective company, which could have made it difficult for some to be critical towards in their assessment of the current leadership culture in their company. In other words, the answers given have to be taken with a grain of salt; though I do not question the honesty of the responses I acknowledge that they have to be assessed critically.

## **SELECTION OF CASE COMPANIES**

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Originally, I was looking for companies whose CEO has been in office for at least 10 years as I was following the hypothesis that a company with a leader in office for this long must have a distinct and successful leadership culture. I contacted Lego, Rockwool Scandinavia, Velux, Kopenhagen Fur, and Jysk, however, only Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur were

willing to collaborate. Although I considered myself very lucky to collaborate with Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur, I contacted more companies, regardless of how long their CEOs had been in office, in order to collect more data and get a better idea of the leadership culture in Danish businesses. However, none of these contacted companies were willing to cooperate with me, which is why I chose to only go forward with Rockwool Scandinavia and Kopenhagen Fur.

Another highly relevant requirement for the selection of case companies was that they are among the Berlingske Business Gold 1000 from 2014, which is a list of the 1000 most successful Danish companies. It seemed natural to choose companies from a list that reflects and judges the excellence of companies. I was working under the assumption that companies that are deemed excellent on their ability to create revenue also must be excellent with regards to their leadership culture.

Finally, I chose two companies from different industries as I originally planned to draw conclusions from these cases to the general status of leadership in Danish companies. My assumption was that, if I chose two companies from the same industry, similarities in findings could be industry-specific; similarities in findings from two companies from different industries, however, could indicate possible general applicability.

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