

M.Sc. In International Business and Politics (IBP)

MASTER'S THESIS

Are Women More Humble Leaders Than Men?

The development of female leadership

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Date of submission: 15-05-2017

Supervisor: Cristiana Parisi

Pages: 63

Characters with spaces: 132.121

Copenhagen Business School 2017

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished and independent work by the author, Hrefna Thórarinsdóttir, and concludes the M.Sc. degree in International Business and Politics at Copenhagen Business School. The supervisor was Cristiana Parisi, and I want to thank her for all the help and suggestions during the writing of this thesis. I would like to thank Angela Murphy for proofreading and good feedback. My fiancée, Sigurður Orri Guðmundsson, for always being my rock, for being so patient and helpful during this emotional roller-coaster. My two beautiful daughters, Svava Nótt and Dóra Sól, for being my inspiration and the reasons for why I do what I do. A special thank goes to my mother, Svava Hjartardóttir, for being my biggest supporter throughout my academic career.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on female leaders and how their role in the business environment has developed in recent years. The specific objective is to explore whether or not, considering the historic and current socio-political landscape, women are more humble leaders than men. Humility as a quality of leaders has gained a lot of momentum over the last decades, as studies have shown that it is one of the main qualities required of a successful leader. This is often evident within certain decision-making and negotiation contexts where a measure of humility on behalf of the leader is considered vital. A theoretical background is reviewed within this paper and a quantitative design is employed. Data gathering is done in the form of a questionnaire that was constructed and filled out by participants. Data was processed and analyzed using the tools of Microsoft Excel and SPSS where average scores of female and male leaders was calculated along with a two-tailed t-test. The results and principal conclusion of the research show no statistical significance in humility between female and male leaders.

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1 Introduction

Throughout history leaders have fascinated people. Even though academic scholars of leadership didn't surface until the mid 20th century, stories of great leaders - heroes who sacrifice for the greater good - have a long history.

Being a leader is considered to be a very desirable and interesting position, while at the same time there are a lot of different views on whether anyone can "become" a true leader. Two perspectives are that one can either be a natural born leader due to their characteristics, or that one can learn and acquire the skills needed to become a leader. Leadership studies are thought of as very gendered, that is, it is very common to consciously or subconsciously associate leadership as a role for a man (Coleman, 2011). The presence of female leaders has become more prominent in recent years in certain parts of the world due to social and political change, but it remains that women face unique challenges in proving themselves as leaders as they must constantly fight gender stereotypes (Catalyst, 2007b).

Women in management have come a long way in the business environment, with research showing that there is continuously growing appreciation of female qualities in this context (Catalyst, 2007a). Still, there is something that prevents women from getting the highest executive jobs.

The difference between female and male leadership styles has widely been discussed over the last years, and scholars do not agree on this difference. Some describe women as more caring leaders and men as leaders that take control, while others believe that there isn't much of a difference. Within such debates, the quality of *humility* has gained a lot of momentum within leadership studies. Results of such studies have indicated that humility within leaders is one of the most important factors for companies to be able to succeed (Collins, 2001; Catalyst, 2014).

1.1 The aim of the thesis and research question

The aim of the thesis is to take a closer look at the development of female leadership in the business environment; to better understand the challenges they face while investigating the trait of humility within female versus male leaders. I will thus attempt to answer the research question:

Are women more humble leaders than men?

An answer to this question is sought out by first reviewing perspectives in the relevant literature and then moving on to the quantitative research phase in the form of a questionnaire. For the questionnaire, it was decided to use the word manager instead of leader, for simplicity purposes. The thesis, thus, uses the terms “manager” and “leader” interchangeably throughout.

1.2 Main findings

The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions meant to gauge participants' perception of humble qualities shown by managers. The questionnaire was shared on social media, Facebook and LinkedIn, as well as sent to 5 small and medium sized companies in Denmark and Iceland. Participants were asked to specify gender, age and level of education. In total, 662 participants answered the questionnaire and 73% of received answers came from female participants.

For 9 out of 12 questions, female managers scored higher than men in participants' judgments. Male managers had a better average score in 2 out of 12 questions and for the one remaining 1 question the average score for both was the same. In spite of female managers general scoring higher overall, there was no statistically significant difference between men and women. It was therefore not possible to conclude that women are more humble leaders than men.

Other than overall scores provided by the participants, what was also of interest within the results was how men versus women responded. The data showed that male participants rated female managers higher in 11 out of 12 questions, and for the remaining question rated female and male managers equally. Male managers did therefore not score better in any question addressing a humble quality. The difference between male and female managers was significant in 1 out of 12 questions for male participants. Female participants perceived the difference between male and female managers to be less than male participants. Female participants gave male managers a better average score in 3 out of 12 questions where male participants never rated male managers better on average. When looking at the difference in rating between male and female participants, male participants provide a higher rating in every question, regardless of the manager's gender.

Male and female managers share the management positions evenly, according to the study, but the CEO positions still belong to men 77% of the time. Moreover, the most

important qualities for a manager to be perceived as “good” are: listening to advice from others, contributing to the development of others and using mistakes as tools to learn.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The outline of the thesis is as follows. Section 2 is the literature review, which starts with an exploration of the concept of leader and leadership. This section will review the different theories within key leadership studies where the main focus is on the “great man” theory and transformational leadership. Next we take a closer look at female leadership, its development, the challenges women leaders might face, and a consideration of the potential differences between male and female leadership styles. The concept of humility will also be addressed from many angles and its importance explained in connection with leadership. Section 3 conveys the methodological considerations behind the research carried out to address the question at hand. The section also reports on the results of the research. Section 4 then summaries the linkages between theoretical perspectives on leadership and the results from the data collection and analysis. It also discussed the limitations of the study and implications for future research. Section 5 rounds off the paper with the essential conclusions of this thesis.

2 Literature review

To be able to answer the research question of whether women are more humble leaders than men, a summary of the theoretical background is provided here. This chapter will first cover the definition of a leader and leadership, including key theories within the literature, followed by a review of the idea (and reality) of the female leader. This will lead on to an outline of literary discussions on professional career trajectories and the unique challenges that women are understood to face in the case of leadership positions. Next in the chapter will be a section disclosing differences that are often references in literature when it comes to male versus female leadership styles. Lastly, this chapter will provide ample examination of the concept of humility and expound upon its treatment within this study, including how it is defined and measured, what it means to be a humble leader and the importance of this.

2.1 What is a leader?

Persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings. (Gardner & Laskin, 1996).

A leader can be defined in many ways and no single definition of a leader is more correct than all the others. This is due to the fact that people interpret the word *leader* differently. That being said, it is safe to assume that many would agree with the above definition by Gardner and Laskin. Namely, that a leader is a person who has the ability to influence other individuals and thus has a measure of power and control over them. This definition is appropriate for the focus of this study that gives attention to leaders in commerce and politics – leaders that may have legal as well as financial authority (in terms of employment) over their followers. The definition of a leader alone however does not tell the whole story. How can a person have this kind of effect on his or her followers? What is it specifically about a leader that makes others follow and listen to them? Such questions come to mind when trying to define the notion of leader, and are vital when it comes to the practices of leadership.

No one is a leader without followers. If leaders do not have the support, if no one listens to them or trusts them, then they are not leaders. Leaders must encourage others to follow their vision and get them to aim for the goals they have set. It can be very

challenging to achieve such influence, and the key to succeeding in this is believed to be a leader's establishment of trust and respect from followers (Tracy, 2010). It is important to bear in mind that leaders need followers as much as followers need a leader, and thus leadership should depend on a bilateral relationship with certain conditions in place. Leaders are significant actors in life as they play a necessary role in the workplace, trade unions, sports, politics, family life, etc.

2.2 What is leadership?

The presence of a leader is a key component in creating leadership but it is not enough to explain the concept of leadership. Definitions of leadership vary greatly, as theorists have different perspectives. Yukl (1989) explains that the term was originally taken from the general discussion and inserted into the theoretical debate without an exact definition. Therefore, since the beginning of leadership studies, each researcher has tried to define the concept. According to Stogdill the number of available definitions of leadership is nearly the same as the number of those who have tried to define it. Stogdill said that nearly 40 years ago, and so we can only imagine the great number of definitions that have emerged thereafter. Everybody has their own understanding of what leadership is. This understanding is based on their own experience and knowledge. Some look at leadership as a result of certain factors or characteristics that leaders have, while others look at leadership as a social development based on the relationships between groups (Bolden, 2004). Others look at leadership as qualities that individuals are born with and cannot develop themselves. This idea has however been changing, and greater understanding of leadership has been developing (Binney, Wilke & Williams, 2005).

Although there are various disputes regarding the concept, it appears that the following definition of leadership is fairly undisputed nowadays; "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." (Northouse, 2013). The concept of leader is thus defined as a person, whereas leadership is defined as a process.

One of the disputes among scholars has been around how to conclude a distinction between managers on the one hand and leaders on the other. Bennis (1999) states that the difference can be found in the type of influence that the leader has. He believes that the leader is, or should be, a leader in development and innovation, while

the manager has the task of making things work out, being present and maintaining the status quo. The leader, however, should be challenging and find new ways and should focus on his people instead and assessing the processes and systems (Bennis, 1999).

Other scholars such as Westley and Mintzberg (1982) claim that there is not so much difference between a leader and a manager, and that it is possible to find a manager and a leader in the same person. Mintzberg has criticized certain leadership studies for focusing too much on “raising up leaders” and convincing people that everyone can become a leader. Because, according to Mintzberg (2003), leadership qualities within people usually emerge before ten years of age. This is one of the biggest disputes within the leadership studies; whether the leader is born a leader or whether leadership can be learned and acquired (Bolden, 2004). This dispute has still not been resolved within the leadership or related.

This paper does not focus specifically on the difference between management and leadership, but rather addresses leadership in a broad sense and assumes that managers can fit this role. What is significant to the case at hand is to take a processional view of leadership and judge it in terms of key activities and common practices.

2.2.1 Development of leadership

Nowadays, leadership is a commonly discussed subject, and many claim that in this dynamic and international environment leadership can have the answer to achieve great results both for individuals, organizations and nations (Bolden, 2004). In the last 60 years leadership has become ever more symbolic; people think way more about how one can become a leader instead of thinking about what leadership actually is (Sinclair, 2007).

Around 1920 and 1930 the theorists Mary Parker Follet and Chester Barnard began to link leadership more with business (Sinclair, 2007). Follet was a pioneer in her field, although her contribution didn't get much attention at that time. She emphasized the human factor in management. Her recommendation was to implement more group-based strategies in company decision-making, and create a more horizontal organizational structure that would reduce the need for employees to compete with each other. Instead the belief was that employees should work together as a whole to increase customer satisfaction and performance (Sethi, 1962).

Since then, the interest in leadership has increased and changed over time, with emphasis during certain periods on the notion that certain types of people are born to rule. Such individuals were considered to have a lot of motivation and ambition, focus and conviction, and were able to deal with setbacks and doubts. After the Second World War this thinking changed, with the experience of leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini casting a dark shadow on idealistic views of leadership. Since the post-war period concentration of business studies went more from the concept of leadership to the concept of management (Sinclair, 2007).

By the mid 21st century, interest shifted towards how it would be possible to harness the scientific and psychological aspects of business and management. Around 1970 researchers started using devices and methods for measuring and developing leadership both in the classroom and also in organizations that used the method to attract staff, train staff and manage their contribution (Sinclair, 2007). At the same time there was a common problem within organizations; there was too much management and not enough leadership; too much control and too little foresight. Following this, the spotlight was turned back on the concept of, and the term transformational leadership became widespread in leadership studies (Sinclair, 2007). This term will be delved into shortly in the coverage of key leadership theories.

Over the last 20 years or so, the business environment has been filled with the idea that leaders should be changeable heroes. In the book "Living Leadership", Binney, Wilke and Williams argue that this thought is outdated (2005). They postulate that it is time to think more realistically and allow greater flexibility in leadership, as well as to stop focusing on the notion of a heroic leader who uses leadership changes to achieve success. Leadership occurs between people and is neither the "property" of the leader nor the followers. Instead this is a social process that is both personal and is the outcome of team-work and organization. Leaders do play a specific role, with some being viewed as a hero and others as a villain, depending on the context and behavior of the particular leader in question. What is known regardless is that in order to achieve results leaders need to connect with the people around them and not take a strictly top-down approach (Binney, et al, 2005). This is the more recent and more democratic thinking in leadership studies. This development of generally accepted understandings has allowed for a greater openness to whom can fill the role of leader depending on their

thinking and behavior rather than gender. That being said, gender-related issues pertaining to leadership undoubtedly remain.

2.1 Leadership theories

Leadership is a popular field of study and numerous books and articles have been written about the subject. The reason for this popularity is most likely connected to its pervasive influence in almost every arena of social life – from the most basic relational structures to the most complex forms of bureaucracy. Leadership studies have focused on a wide range of factors, including that of skills. Leadership skills refer to an individual's ability to lead others toward a common goal (Northouse, 2013).

The first theories were trait theories, and they were very popular early in the 20th century. During the period of 1920-1940 many studies explored which qualities were most common within leaders and successful individuals in the field of business, politics, etc. (Yukl, 1989). Critics of the trait theories thought that it was not successful in answering the question of why some people were able to excel in leadership while others with similar traits did not. They also criticized the trait-based perspective for looking too much toward the great man theory that idealized a particular laundry list of qualities that do not necessarily occur all together in real life leaders (Stogdill, 1969).

Numerous other leadership theories surfaced within the 20th century whose contributions also shifted focus from the quality-based theory to behavioral, situational and transformational leadership theories, to name a few (Yukl, 1989).

In the 21st century the focus has shifted once again to present new paradigms on the subject, such as that of authenticity and Collins' (2001) treatment of humility, have increased emphasis on the virtues of the leader (Barker 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that the leadership studies have gone back to the beginning with focus put back on personal qualities. The following section delves into the two leadership theories that are most applicable to the focus of this study.

2.1.1 The great man theory

The first theories about leadership can be traced all the way to the year 1869, when the book "Genius" (1869) by Francis Galton Hereditary first introduced the great man theory. In this work Galton sought to demonstrate that those who excel are born with certain qualities that help them reach higher than others (Zaccaro, 2007).

Thomas Carlyle (1841) had an even greater influence on the great man theory than Galton did. He described the leader as the able man, i.e. the king that everyone learns from and believes in. He also connected the resurrection of leaders with conflicts; proposing that revolution happens because unable men have taken control. Examples of this exist in all spheres of life; from the younger, stronger wolf becoming the leader of the pack, to political overthrow, mutiny on a ship, or a reformation within a religion. In Carlyle's time, due to the social positioning of women there was no mentioning of qualified women or female leadership. It was assumed that the leader was a man, and thus the term great "man" (Carlyle, 1841).

Both Carlyle and Galton assumed that the hero is born, not made. That the king is born to rule over others. This attitude remained considerably attractive in the first decades of the 20th century, at least up until the work of Stogdill (1948). The aim of Stogdill's work was to understand the difference between leaders and other individuals. He found out that there were certain qualities that distinguished leaders from others. The results showed that they had qualities such as initiative, responsibility, determination, insight, understanding and confidence, but he later found out that those qualities alone could not predict whether a given individual would become a leader or not (Kets de Vries, et al., 1994).

Leo Tolstoj (1869) did not agree with Carlyle and Galton. While he did not explicitly disagree with the fact that some are better suited to lead than others, he also gave weight to the impact that communities have in "making" leaders. Tolstoj agreed with Carlyle that heroes often arise in the wake of conflict, and accordingly argued that heroes are always the offspring of social circumstances. His overriding view was that leaders evolve out of communities, conflicts and circumstances rather than congenital qualities (Bennis, 1999).

Over the last decades, it has become common to observe arguments that the theory of the great man is dead (Northouse, 2013). However, not everyone agrees with this viewpoint. Cawthon and Organ (1996) argue that the great man theory does still apply, despite the large number of new theories in leadership. This is based on the fact that no recent theory has been able to refute the great man theory or provide valid alternative explanations to the one that some are naturally born better leaders. While personal characteristics are legitimate features of leadership it is also reasonable to state that the great man theory represents only a one-sided point of view in terms of

defining leadership. The name of the theory alone is indication enough of its outdated foundation.

2.1.2 Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership is a leadership style that was first employed in the workplace post-WW1, and increasingly since 1970 it has been considered the most common leadership approach for companies and administrations (Behling & Mcfallen, 1996). This leadership style is a straightforward vertical approach for executives, since the organizational chart of the company is very clear; leaders lead because of their strong position in the company. Supervision and performance is key and, unlike transformational leadership that will soon be explained, the strategy here is to maintain the status quo. While this may have been cost-effective in the short-term, the company's future, policy, goals and so forth, were not considered or revised (Avolio, Waldman & Yanimarina, 1991).

Reward or punishment is the extrinsic motivation used to mobilize employees to do a good job - and the employees' job is to obey their boss. Transactional leadership comes from a military model where everything is controlled from the top down. Each person's responsibility is clear, the instructions are clear and all employees know what their role is. Managers punish and believe that the punishment is what gets the employees to behave as they should (Bass, 1990).

The focus of management strategies has been constantly evolving since the more military/industrial approach of transaction leadership. Around 1980, companies began to realize that this leadership style wasn't working in achieving the desired results. Managers became more aware that adapting to the environment and laying the grounds for the future of the company were more important than sticking to business as usual. This change acted as a catalyst of development within management literature (Burns, 1978), with scholars shifting their attention to the notion of transformational leadership.

2.1.3 Transformational leadership

When trait theories were considered insufficient to explain what separated the leaders from others, researches turned to behavioral and contextual elements of leadership,

including environmental uncertainty and a leader's ability to influence transformation (Northouse, 2013).

Theories of transformational leadership are in some ways a continuation of the trait theories because they focus their attention on the leader by asking how a specific trait affects his or her followers (Avolio, 1999). Burns (1978) explains transformational leadership in terms of the symbolic position of leader but also in terms of necessary processes. The transformation referred to requires the involvement of people and businesses in this process, as well as initiative on behalf of the leader. Burns also distinguished between transactional leadership and transformational leadership. He considered both theories to be based on the assumption that it is possible to use motivation to achieve change. The difference is in the type of motivation the leader taps into when influencing others. The transactional leader is thought more likely to impose penalties and rewards (extrinsic motivation) to achieve what he wants from his staff, but the transformational leader believes that he only needs to create a spark with his followers by conviction, inspiration and having a clear vision of the goal (intrinsic motivation) (Northouse, 2013).

Transformational leadership was a significant development within the field, as it was the first to take a holistic approach including the importance of qualities, situations and behavior in shaping a leader (Yukl, 1989). However, like the great man theory, it has also faced criticism due to how at its core it's still the more unilateral understanding of the leader being above all and with all the answers (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005).

2.2 The idea of a female leader

According to Collins (2001), leadership is always inspired by the relationship that exists between the leaders and their followers, and hence neither gender nor race should be relevant. The leader's performance is based mainly on the type of person the leader is, his or her main qualities and skills (Collins, 2001). Although gender is not considered relevant in this view, there are certain stereotypes in our society that affect us in terms of judging male and female leaders differently (Sandberg, 2013). A common example would be how women leaders in the workplace have been referred to as "bossy" in spite of often simply exercising the same skills and authority that would be acceptable of a man in the same position. Such judgments are believed to inhibit women's progress in

becoming a leader or moving up in a leadership position. Attitude towards women and men as leaders is often very different, a fact indicated by most political poles and focus groups. This is arguably due to power throughout history being held by patriarchal figures, while the primary role assigned to women was that of wife and motherhood. In spite of the suffragist movement and the efforts of feminism to empower women, traditional attitudes – whether conscious or subconscious – towards gender roles are reflected in judgments of current or prospective leaders. Women as leaders are often thought of as taking more care of their subordinates (behavior resembling motherhood), while the image of male leaders is characterized more by the need to “take charge” (behavior resembling the hunter/warrior). One study that has conveyed the presence of such differences in judgment was carried out by the company Catalyst, which is an international research and consulting company that specializes in gender and leadership roles (Catalyst, 2005). Elements of this research will be drawn upon further along in this paper.

Female leaders are not considered tough enough, nor determined enough and tend to apply more soft skills in their management positions, while men tend to rather focus on the solution of the subject regardless of how his followers feel or think about the issue (Marques, 2013). Men are usually more aggressive, tougher and tend to apply more so-called “hard skills” that involve analytical/technical competences, intelligence, determination and a specific view of the subject. The softer skills that female leaders are traditionally considered to apply include a greater level of self-awareness, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills (Marques, 2013). Should such generalizations have any relevance to the abilities required of a potential leader? At first, one would think this is the case since in the past the main focus of leadership and management has been more about the hard skills, the importance of showing boldness and of having superior knowledge. What the latest studies indicate, however, is that features of both of these leadership styles are actually effective especially when combined (a mixed approach). A related recent study proposes that there is a growing need for and momentum of individuals with softer skills (Wilson, 2015). If such a proposition is true, then the “humility” trait that is more characteristic to applying softer skills could be even more embraced by leaders. In particular, what is of interest is whether or not women leaders are more likely to capitalize on this trait (whether it comes naturally to

them or not) due to traditional assumptions that humility is naturally a more “female” trait.

It is admirable to uphold the position that the effectiveness of a leader is based on his or her qualities, behavior and experience and not gender or any predetermined ideas (Collins, 2001). It is however more logical to accept the fact that there exist general differences in how male versus female leaders are judged. With this acceptance it is possible to disentangle the issue of gender in leadership, and tackle concrete questions. Whether or not women are expected to be more humble leaders is one question, grounded in undeniable associations made with gender roles. Whether or not women leaders actually are more humble is another question entirely, and is one that this study takes on. It is hoped that exploring such questions can better explain the causes of stereotypes and in certain cases disprove their influence on real life examples. Sinclair (2005) argues that gender stereotypes are a main reason for why women have reported experiencing challenges in getting leadership positions. This is one view that treats gender stereotypes as having significant impact. An alternative perspective is that a leader will strive to become a leader regardless of roadblocks in their way, and not succumb to the stereotypical behavior imposed upon them. In other words, women may not be “more humble leaders” than men simply because it seems intuitive to many that that would be the case. Oppositely this study may find this hypothesis to be confirmed. Either way, more light will be shed on the actual practices and characteristics that occur in leaders of our time.

2.3 The development of women in management

There has been a significant increase in the number of women in management positions over the last years, at least in the western world. In 1976, the proportion of women in management positions in USA was 21%, but by 1999 this figure had gone up to 46% (Powell et al, 2002). Around 1970, the value of so-called “feminine qualities” began to grow in the context of working life. These qualities usually referred to sympathy, emotional sense and understanding etc. This change subsequently meant an increased number of women employed in management positions (Powell et al, 2002). The focus has shifted from encouraging women to follow men’s managerial style to focus rather on their own “female qualities” that they bring to the job (Wajcman, 1998). However, despite this increase in management jobs, women account for only 28,3% of all

executive positions, and out of the highest paid managers, women account for only 6,7% (Catalyst, 2007a).

In the period of 1996-2000 a comprehensive study was conducted by Catalyst by using 353 companies on the US Fortune 500 list. The results showed that there was a significant link between gender diversity management and the financial performance of the companies at hand. During the time throughout which the study was carried out there was a simultaneous economic growth period and information on gender diversity was reliable. Two indicators were used to measure the performance of the companies: return on equity and total return to shareholders. In those companies where the number of women in senior management positions was highest, the return on equity was 35,1% higher and shareholders total return was 34% higher than their counterpart companies. When the researchers controlled for the influence of position, the analysis yielded the same results. In those companies where the percentage of women was highest in senior management positions, the companies had better results at all times when looking at return on equity and in four out of five professions when looking at the total return of shareholders in comparison with companies with the lowest ratio (Catalyst, 2004).

Several years later, another comparable study was conducted on whether the performance of the companies was significantly better if women were directors of the companies. Again, the sample was used in terms of taking into account companies from the US Fortune 500 list, and financial information was obtained from the Standard & Poor database. The results were based on a four-year average based on data from 2001-2004, and these showed a significantly better performance of the companies where three or more women were directors (Catalyst, 2007a). The same survey was repeated between 2004-2008 demonstrating the same results. The general conclusion from these studies was that companies are financially better off when more women sit at the decision-making table (Catalyst, 2011). These results indicate a significant relationship between gender equality and outstanding corporate performance, but there are many other factors that can potentially affect business performance. These factors can include innovation, efficiency, customer loyalty, job satisfaction, positive working environment and other financial factors. It is fair to state however that a greater diversity within a decision-making team tends to bring about better policies, processes and workplaces that maximize a company's resources. Whether or not women leaders actually act

humble when at the decision-making table is the type of question of interest within this study.

2.4 Challenges women in leadership face

One challenge faced by women are the initial barriers when aspiring to become leaders. The term barrier represents some kind of a fence or a roadblock that prevents movement or access to something that is sought after. Any kind of obstacles can be very restrictive, whether it's career, development or performance. It can be very difficult to overcome them and it can be even harder to point them out (Catalyst, 2007a).

There are various challenges and obstacles that people face working their way up the corporate or political ladder. People go many different ways in their career paths, but women's progress in the economy seems to generally speaking be slower than men's. Results from a study conducted by Elmuti, Jia and Davis in 2009, showed that about 50% of women in leadership jobs in USA believe that they faced distinct barriers that often postpone and even completely discourage women from progressing (Elmuti, Jia & Davis, 2009). Various explanations have been studied to try to explain why women's progress in companies is slower than men's. What will now be outlined are examples of barriers considered to be unique to women in the workplace.

2.4.1 The "Glass Ceiling"

The glass ceiling is one of the most pervasive studies investigating the topic of female leadership. It became a theory that was first introduced as a metaphor in 1996 to explain the invisible barriers which women face in reaching for senior management positions within companies. The glass ceiling, however, is not a single ceiling or barrier that women come face-to-face with, but rather a combination of tacit and/or explicit gender stereotypes present within the workplace. The term is not just about gender; it has also been applied to discrimination based on race and sexual orientation discrimination (Dreher, 2003).

The metaphorical significance of the glass ceiling is in its invisibility (often tacit) and unpredictability (how do you know when you'll hit a barrier if you can't explicitly see it). This term was presented by journalists in the Wall Street Journal. There it was stated that women come full force from lower positions and are able to work their way up very fast, but when they reach a certain point in their trajectory, progress stops. They were able to see the corner office and could almost reach it but something prevented

them, and that is the glass ceiling. This caught the attention of the US government, which thereafter set up a committee to investigate this “glass ceiling”. In 1995 a report came out which concluded that discrimination against women in the workplace was present. Within this report was the finding that when it came to hiring it was often thought that it would be too risky to hire women as executives, due to the belief that women are more likely to quit in order to raise a family. One administrator even said publicly that he would rather hire a male that would take the full time job and never quit rather than a much more capable woman (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Such an example underscores the occurrence of blatant biases that reinforce the “glass ceiling”.

Eagly and Carli have reviewed this subject, and postulate that the glass ceiling does not apply today, at least not as much as it did. They argue that education, development and work experience are very important to those who intend to achieve senior management positions. They put forward that in previous years the attitude towards women was that they were not considered to possess these advantages, which was the main grounds upon which they were denied their desired positions (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Nowadays in western society women tend to be equally if not more educated than men. Women may, however, be in a minority group when it comes to work experience because their responsibilities have over the decades been associated with household and childcare (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Eagly and Carli (2007) also found out that in marriages where both the husband and wife work in management-level jobs, childcare and household responsibilities fall more on the wife. The results of Eagly and Carli’s study on women in management indicated that women tend to feel discriminated against in the workplace when it comes to challenging tasks. Specifically, they may face the hesitation of their superiors in bestowing them with high-priority tasks which carry a significant level of responsibility; something that requires a certain level of trust in their competences. Handling such tasks is in fact what is necessary to strengthen an employee’s knowledge and experience in the company, which can result in improved performance as well as greater potential to eventually be selected for a leadership position (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Eagly and Carli believe that women have been breaking their way through the glass ceiling for a while now. There are indeed plenty of examples of women who have succeeded seemingly independently of any potential gender-related barriers that they may have had to overcome. What Eagly and Carli argue is that for such women their way

to the top is less like a ladder and more like a labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007), in terms of the unpredictable, indirect and tricky environment they must overcome to achieve success. This idea will be explored further along in chapter 2.4.2. In spite of opinions in academia stating that the glass ceiling is less relevant nowadays, certain scholars still hold that it is as present as ever before. According to Baxter and Wright (2000), the glass ceiling is very much alive and relevant as studies continue to show that as a woman climbs higher and higher up the corporate ladder, she will find that the possibility of promotion reduces with each step (Baxter & Wright, 2000). This is a subject that has another side, that women might also be more inclined to actually want to stop at a certain position of power.

2.4.1.1 The glass cliff

The glass cliff is a particular additional barrier, with the term being used in reference to situations in which women tend to take riskier and more unstable management positions. There are various indications that, more often than men, women take management jobs that come with a greater risk of making mistakes and receiving criticism. Moreover, the positions that women get are often more related to management of organizational units that are undergoing difficulties (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

A study conducted by Haslam and Ryan in 2008, on the subject conveyed the validity of the notion of the glass cliff. Within the study, three participant groups were given the choice between a number of individuals for the position of a leader for an imaginary company whose performance was either increasing or decreasing. The groups consisted of graduate students enrolled in an international management course at a British university. 64% of participants were female, and the median age of participants was 24 (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

The results were that a woman was chosen over an equally skilled man when the company's position was assessed as decreasing. According to the glass cliff, appointment is related to people's assumptions that women are better at crisis management than men, that they handle stress and multitasking better. The essence of the glass cliff is that once women manage to break through the glass ceiling and land a leadership position, their experiences in such positions have key differences compared to the experiences of men in the same position. This phenomenon is thus consistent with the theoretical

perspectives that have emphasized a distinction between “male” versus “female” capacities. Women are thus considered to be more understanding, empathetic, intuitive and better able to manage stress (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). The existence of this glass cliff, often demanding more from women in relation to “cleaning up the mess” of a crisis, can be related back to the focus of the research. It is logical to assume that in crisis management, the more diplomatic a leader is in mitigating such situations, the better things will turn out. A diplomatic approach most often requires a firm and yet humble demeanor. The concept of a glass cliff could therefore suggest that it is more likely that women leaders are more humble than their male counterparts. They may be this way naturally, or be pressed to develop a more humble disposition in order to face the particular challenges of a company’s short or long-term deterioration. Whether this study finds this to be the case of course remains to be seen.

If women are more humble, than perhaps these circumstances are easier for them to deal with. Someone who is very proud would logically be less likely to be in a position that involved taking a lot of criticism.

2.4.2 The labyrinth

The same journalist who coined the term “glass ceiling” published a later article in 2004 titled “Through the Glass Ceiling”. In this article he explained how some women manage to break their way through the glass ceiling and obtain executive jobs. Navigating challenging terrain undoubtedly comes with most leadership positions, whether held by a man or a woman. That being said, maneuvering through a particularly challenging and confusing environment of work opportunities has been attributed to the experiences of women working towards significant promotions; and hence the term “labyrinth” to portray such conditions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The labyrinth includes the dead ends and the unusual paths that women usually need to take to get to the top. The term repeatedly comes up within leadership studies. Northouse (2013) provides a three-part dissemination of this, describing each obstacle individually and explaining how certain barricades are unpredictable and tend to occur at different times and different places within a woman’s career as the journey through the labyrinth is different for everyone. The impactful factors that women face within the labyrinth are prejudices, gender differences with regard to personal characteristics, management styles and human resources in general, which refers to education,

professional experience and possibilities. Northouse gives women who aim for management positions two pieces of advice in making their way through the labyrinth. First, they should always demonstrate that they are both agentic and communal, and second, they should be effective in forming social relationships (Northouse, 2013).

2.4.3 Pipeline theory

Pipeline theory is another theory that addresses women's obstacles on their way up the ladder. According to the theory, the proportion of women in executive management jobs will be corrected over time and that for now their progress is simply slower than men's. It predicts that women's socio-economic status in general, including within the business environment, will be stronger over time with more awareness and emphasis on gender equality. Pervasive socio-political factors surely influence work dynamics for both women and men, but it is hoped that in time the variable of gender will become irrelevant and positions of power accordingly will be more evenly distributed (Rodrigues, 2011). In sum, pipeline theory advocates that increasing the number of women in male-dominated fields should lead to more equality in the labor market. This perspective does not account for differences in the expectations of men and women within the pipeline, which may serve to perpetuate inequities.

Ryan, Pollock and Antonelli (2009) criticized the pipeline theory and even came up with a term "Leaky Pipeline" to describe its inadequacy. This refers to the fact that many women enter but then tend to "leak out" of certain career pipelines, particularly in scientific fields thought to be more "geeky" (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). Another criticism is that the theory still doesn't explain why women that manage to come out of such pipelines still don't have the same access to the highest positions as their male colleagues (Geeks Feminism, 2015).

2.4.4 Role congruity theory (the concrete wall)

When looking at the barriers women face in powerful positions, standardization is one of the most forceful. Various cultural values have a deep impact on beliefs and attitudes towards various aspects of social life, which is reflected in our conduct and behavior. Individuals tend to standardize their analyses of unknown persons as an efficient way of categorizing them into the categories of threatening or non-threatening. This is an evolutionary mechanism that is arguable helpful to an extent, especially in urban life within which we must make instantaneous judgments of thousands of strangers whom

we cross paths with on a daily basis. Such standardization manifests itself in the form of preconceived ideas about the characteristics of people who fall under a certain group or a state of society, otherwise called stereotypes. Stereotypes are created within the community and say how these particular groups should behave or what purpose they should serve (Northouse, 2013).

Stereotypes tend to evolve along with cultural changes in a society, and scholars believe that these cultural changes should create incentives among the community to change these stereotypes. However, the influences of the media, social status and one's individuals experience can also work against progression and rather reinforce existing stereotypes or create new ones. The media plays a very important role regarding the creation and development of stereotypes as they report on current events in a community; how they frame such events can indeed leverage the public's attitudes of a particular social group based on gender, race, orientation etc. (Crites, Dickson & Lorenz, 2015). Similar to but still unique from the glass ceiling, the concrete wall refers to the even more resilient barriers faced by women of color. While the glass ceiling is problematic, it can at least be shattered and looked through. A concrete wall on the other hand is more synonymous of a dead end – a seemingly impenetrable roadblock in one's career path. Although this study does not tackle the theme of race per se, it is relevant to mention the concrete ceiling in recognition of the fact that not all women – just like not all men – have the same experiences when climbing the corporate ladder.

The increasing research on perception of gender and leadership style we can see that role congruity theory underscores the inconsistencies between typical social norms of female characteristics and those characteristics ascribed to leadership, which is one of the main causes of gender inequalities in management (Crites, Dickson & Lorenz, 2015). Not all that long ago the status quo appointed that women should devote their energies in the home, including child-rearing and housework. What has also been and still often is believed in a multiplicity of cultures (partly due to religious teachings) is that women should be subordinate to men, and accordingly be of a meek and submissive disposition. We may like to think that we've come a long way since such times, and depending on where we are in the world this may be true. However, management studies clearly indicate that "old-school" values still prevail in our "contemporary" world. In some ways the glass ceiling and/or concrete wall has at least weakened in the context of western society, with improved access to education and employment for women (Eagly & Carli,

2007). What is of interest to this study is whether women still (purposefully or unconsciously) exercise the trait of humility in order to comply a traditional image of a “woman”, even after having become a leader. The precise causes of why women are or are not more humble than men may not be found within this study. Inspecting this topic does however evoke such intriguing related aspects.

A research was made in 2005 by Catalyst, where a survey was presented for managers in different countries, for both women and men, and the results where that women are considered to be better at showing support and appreciation than men (Catalyst, 2005.). But the delimitation with this research is that the responses might be influenced of standardization, as in stereotypes, instead of being formed by facts and experience. It is, however, not meant in a negative way, it just means that people do not always realize that they have these stereotypes in mind and answer with the best of their ability and believe that they are expressing their own opinion, which is formed by facts but not stereotypes as explained in this chapter. But despite this, it is very important that stereotypes have begun to disappear and the results of this research done by Catalyst do show exactly that. Because, even though the survey shows that women are better at the feminine factors and men in the male dominant factors, there is a difference in how much better the genders are in their factors. Where there is a smaller difference between the sexes for example consulting and networking you can see that the stereotype is disappearing and person’s qualities are more important than his gender. But the biggest difference between the sexes was in the elements that connect women with care and men with management and that is clearly affected by stereotypes, because it is easy to connect factors like support and appreciation with the taking care of image that women have. It is however more difficult to connect factors such as consulting and networking with the care image, although those elements are also defined as a female management (Catalyst, 2005).

2.5 Review of female and male leadership styles

When the discussion is about leadership roles our mind may wonder to the existence of gender discrepancies, largely because we most likely know of more male leaders than female. Every president in the USA has been a man, so were Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. When thinking of business leaders, male individuals also most likely come to mind; Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg as an example. A fact that

reflects how the portrayal of leadership has been focused on masculine qualities (Mintzberg, 1994). Even within the world's most widespread religions, God (perhaps the most symbolic image of leader) is referred to with the use of the male pronoun.

When it actually comes down to the key differences in leadership styles however, opinions are divided as to whether there is any substantial difference at all (Eagly and Carly, 2007). The first studies addressing this question found that female managers were more likely to implement a democratic management and transformational leadership style. On one hand, women in management positions were therefore considered more effective at encouraging their employees and engaging in projects with a high level of motivation. On the other hand, male managers were more likely to stay on the sidelines and focus on consolidating their own power through a top-down approach. The men would tend to take on a more transactional leadership style by implementing more formal management practices focus on ensuring that objectives/goals were reached and that the employees followed precise commands (Northouse, 2013).

In 1990, Judy Rosener published a critical article that discussed how women manage. The findings of Rosener's study were based on interviews with various female managers. The results of the study indicated that women who got executive management jobs adopted the strategy of imitating the behavior that proved successful among male managers. This was in an attempt to duplicate what they believed were the "best practices" of those with leadership roles. With more women working in management positions however, these commonly accepted norms changed and the next wave of female managers seemed to rather capitalize of the skills, behaviors and activities that they believed were the best for their situation regardless of whether these were viewed as "male" or "female" (Rosener, 1990).

Women's leadership style has gained more acceptance and even desirability within certain commercial contexts; at times even considered more effective than the more "male" leadership style (Northouse, 2013). The results of Burkes and Collins' (2015) study suggest that when it comes to differences, women are more likely than men to display an interactive management style, which is one expression of transformational leadership. This leadership style was found to be positively related with various other benefits of the manager, including success. Female managers were particularly more effective than men when it came to coaching, communication and development (Burke & Collins, 2015).

The “female” leadership style is often more connected with both professional and personal benefits for both managers and their subordinates. This quality of female managers is considered to build up the self-development of employees (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) and is different from the male leadership style, where the focus can be more on control and power. Male managers are considered to start the job, ensure that it is properly carried out regardless of what the employees feel about the operations and tend to quickly identify if any deviations occur and then seize and correct them. They have a more rigid protocol of what they want from their staff, rewarding desired behavior while punishing unwanted behavior and believing that by doing this they keep their power as directors (Northouse, 2013).

With increased research and development on leadership practices, discrepancies between traditional views on gender-roles are believed to soon disappear especially in relation to leadership (Northouse, 2013). Even more results show that since women are getting more and more management positions, it is becoming a tendency to respect the management style of each person on an individual basis and not favor or discriminate against any one gender (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Even so, Northouse (2013) still states that female managers become more successful at places that are considered to be traditionally “more feminine”, such as social care jobs where the strength of communication is more important than elsewhere; also male managers achieve greater success in a male-dominated places such as in the technology sector or the military (Northouse, 2013).

Deborah Gillis, president and CEO of Catalyst, says that there is a very positive development taking place regarding the increase of women in management positions of companies. Still she wants to see more actions that can promote faster development (Taylor, 2015). It should be noted that not all countries experience this development and there is still a significant disparity between gender diversity in leadership roles.

2.5.1 Women take care of while men take charge over

It is often said that women manage by taking care of their subordinates while men manage by taking the control over them (Catalyst, 2005). This attitude is still alive and kicking, reinforced by the continued stereotype that all women have certain qualities and all men others. For example, it is believed that women are more sensitive while men are more rational. Although the belief that all women bare motherly characteristics and

all men are unemotional beings is untrue, scholars have made an attempt to encapsulate distinctive behaviors that are – generally speaking – linked to gender.

Maume and Ruppanner (2015) explain that female leaders are normally more concerned about equality at the workplace compared to male leaders. Women are also more likely to help their subordinates to develop and promote their employability by sharing information with them, giving them responsibilities and finding solutions or necessary resources that come in handy for an individual, team and/or the company as a whole. Studies show that when female leaders provide additional information, resources and visible projects to other female subordinates then they will be more likely to earn a salary increase according to what the men get (Maume & Ruppanner, 2015).

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women adhere to a more complex structure of companies while men are more likely to adhere to a pyramid structure. Female leadership style is associated more with flexibility and democracy and a greater attention to individual needs specifically when it comes to training (Eagly & Carli, 2007). According to Eagly and Carli (2007), female executives adhere to an interactive management style, where employees are active participants and accordingly feel more appreciated. Female managers generally use awards as motivation to encourage the behavior they seek. In contrast, male managers are generally not as involved in the working environment of their subordinates and thus can be more likely to ignore initial signs of serious problems. Therefore, men have the tendency to try to fix mistakes after they have occurred instead of getting ahead of them (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

There are different opinions of what is expected of male and female managers. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), males are expected to talk with determination, to compete for attention and influence others. On the other hand, female managers are supposed to be hesitant, subdued, humble, attentive and supportive of the suggestions and problems of their employees. A more objective set of requirements would tentatively be to remain comfortable, supportive in team building, exhibit flexibility, and be soft and humble in communication (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Being a compassionate manager is an advantage. However, this can entail disadvantages as well. If you expect female managers to be helpful, you might also expect them to be “soft” and therefore not tenacious enough. Such behavior is usually considered less important when it comes to high-level management positions. Thus, being helpful can increase the likeability of the manager at the cost of strengthening his

or her position/status towards senior individuals. This gender difference in management styles reflects the duplicity required to get senior management position. Carli and Eagly argue that women need to be more qualified than men in order to be considered equal, and if they do make mistakes they are more likely than men to be harshly (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Although Eagly and Carli (2007) pointed out that researches show that there isn't a lot of difference in leadership styles between women and men, they do state that it doesn't apply when women believe themselves to be part of a minority group within the company. They tend to try to be accepted and therefore try to change their management approaches by imitating the male leadership style as explained by Judy Rosener. This is a common occurrence within male-dominated industry sectors and especially in larger corporations (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

According to Eagly and Carli, gender equality is not achieved until women and men both have equal access to similar management positions regardless of irrelevant traits (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Although some psychological studies have shown a link between these certain requisite traits and the gender variable, general differences between men and women are in fact relatively minute when examining qualities such as determination, sociality, risk mitigation and ethical practices (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The fact remains that women need to work much harder than men to get to the same place that they are (Burgess & Tharenou, 2002). Numerous studies show that women managers have a very high level of education. Education is generally looked at with respect, and administrators see education as providing a level of credibility to a job candidate. In this regard opportunities may be improving for women due to the fact that in some countries (such as the UK and US) they are becoming more educated than men (Singh et al., 2008). In spite of positive developments in the light of equal opportunity, standardized/stereotypical views on "male versus female" leadership roles still remain a threat to such progress (Catalyst, 2005). The next section takes a closer look at the possibilities of overcoming such standardization.

2.5.2 How to fight standardization?

Anderson et al. (2015) propose three methods to be utilized with the objective of reducing the negative effects of bias towards female leaders. The first method, structured free recall (SFR), consists of asking subjects to think systematically about

both the negative and positive behavior of the human being that is being monitored, to prevent them from basing assessments on a standard prior analysis of the person (Anderson et al., 2015). The second method, source-monitoring (SM), involves IT equipment that has been used with memory research and with teaching subjects to differentiate between the opinion that they know and what they remember (Anderson, et al., 2015). The third and final method, error management training (EMT), is an active learning process where subjects are given the opportunity to make errors and then the errors are used to raise awareness by promoting self-regulation and self-perception behavior (Anderson et al., 2015).

Results from Anderson et al.'s study showed that these methods can reduce the level of bias against female leaders, although they do require a large amount of investment and interest in order to achieve their purpose. The results showed that SFR and SM methods are more relevant than the EMT method. The researchers believe that the results can improve women's opportunities for leadership jobs and that it is in fact in the hands of the companies or the institutions themselves to utilize these techniques to overcome gender bias (Anderson et al, 2015). This however, could be overwhelmingly expensive for companies.

As we look at the study made by Catalyst in 2005, which was explained in the chapter of role congruity theory. We can see that women also say that they are much better in all the feminine factors than men and also consider men to be better in the male-dominated factors. Therefore, women need a change of attitude as well, their own answers are also affected by stereotypes. There is only one factor, which is believed to be male-dominated and is connected with taking control, that the women don't think they are worse than men, that factor is "problem solving". It turned out that women and men disagree on this factor. Male respondents felt that this factor would have the biggest difference between men and women, they believe that they are much better at problem solving. But women, as men believed that they were much better at it. There they were able to look past everything called standardization. It is likely that they realize that this is one of the most important factor in being a good and effective manager (Catalyst, 2005).

2.6 Humility

To be a “good” leader requires a plethora of qualities. This section will explore the quality at the center of the research at hand: humility. Humility is one of the virtues that have recently attracted attention from leadership academics, and throughout the past centuries has been the subject of philosophy and religion (Vera & Rodrigues-Lopez, 2004). It is a trait that is widely appraised in relation to leadership, such as within Jim Collins’ 2001 bestseller “Good to Great”. One of the main conclusions of the book, which was based on a study of nearly 1,500 companies, was that achieving the balancing act between being humble and strong was what allowed leaders to transform their businesses for the better (Collins, 2001).

2.6.1 The meaning of humility and how it’s measured

Humility has its roots in various religions including Christianity; it is a state in which people are able to submit themselves to the will of God. The word is derived from the Latin word *humus*, meaning ground. Being humble thus implies remaining grounded or in touch with reality, not allowing one’s own views to blind their judgment. Humility can also be understood by considering its antonyms, such as arrogance or self-pride (Humility, 2011).

Many scholars have pointed out the difficulty with defining virtues like humility as well as the complexity of measuring it. No final measure has been settled upon, although researchers have made various attempts to assess whether a person is humble or not, with variable results (Elliott, 2010). According to new definitions that are used for this study, humility is understood as “a realistic self-esteem” reflecting the symmetry between being open and approachable on one hand but firm and strong on the other. Humility has previously been associated with low-esteem, which would be a serious issue for any potential leader, but is now related to a “right” kind of self-esteem (Ryan, 1983). This new way of thinking is founded on concepts of fairness, such as that the leader is required to evaluate his or her self in the same way as they would anyone else (the golden rule). Those who possess humility are considered to have the ability to admit powerlessness in certain areas, but then realize their excellence in other areas (Elliot, 2010).

Tangney (2000) believes that there are two main reasons why humility hasn’t been researched enough. The first reason is because of the pervasive lack of a universal

standard of how to measure it, and the second is due to its deep-seated connection to religious values (Tangney, 2000). As Rowatt (2006) points out, humility is a quality that is difficult to identify with a personal test, because the person that is humble is unlikely to point that out and if he is bragging about being humble then it's likely that he isn't. A truly humble leader is not aware that he is humble (Elliott, 2010).

Studies on contrasting characteristics however, such as pride, have presupposed what makes one "not humble" (Rowatt, et al., 2006 ; Tangney, 2000). Rowatt (2002) has applied the "self-other" technique to try to measure humility, employing a method that describes the tendency of individuals to see them differently than others do. Within such a study, participants are required to answer questions and someone who knows them very well are required to answer the same questions about them. The answers are then compared, and if the participant turns out to evaluate himself in a similar manner as the persons close to him, he is considered to have humility since his self-assessment is realistic. Davis, Worthington and Hook (2010) have gone a step further and used methods that are based entirely on the perception of others in examining an individual. Still others such as Exline and Geyer (2004) have tried to identify humility by getting participants to describe an incident from their own past experiences in which they felt that they acted humbly.

Although there isn't a final measurement of humility, it's worth mentioning that studies built on personality tests have had success in demonstrating how humble behavior can be useful for companies. One of psychology's most used personality test within the last decades has been "The Big Five" which is used to evaluate the defining qualities of particular individuals and map their personalities. In 2000, a new personality test called HEXACO came into the spotlight. This test is based on six dimensions of personality (Ashton & Lee, 2007). One of these dimensions includes honesty and humility, whereas the Big Five model does not measure these qualities as explicitly. In two recent studies that looked at the reliability of the HEXACO scale it was found that this sixth dimension of humility and honesty is a good indicator of performance in practice (Johnson, Rowatt & Petrini, 2011), as well as that individuals scoring high on this dimension are also likely to distribute quality at a reasonable level (Hilbig & Zettler, 2009).

2.6.2 A humble leader

A humble leader might sound like an oxymoron, especially considering the political landscape of the 21st century. However, as argued so far, humility is in fact a highly desirable quality of a leader, especially if they can manage to balance this with exercising power when appropriate. Quinn (2004) argues that a leader is considered humble when he or she sees the world as it is in reality. That definition is in line with the definitions mentioned above. To further expound upon this understanding, the following provides a brief review of three relevant studies on the subject.

Vera and Lopez (2004) imply that humility is primarily the ability to make a realistic assessment of one's own work and success; to put oneself into perspective and provide a realistic assessment of merit. The authors ascribe importance to humility and underscore its advantages in the context of management and corporate culture.

The list provided in Table 1 comes from case-based data collected over a five-year period. The purpose of this study was to identify "humble behavior" in management. In this case the researchers' analyses provided a list of 13 points that describe what behaviors and activities are characteristic of a humble leader. It is postulated that leaders who abide by these are more likely to experience sustained and not just short-term success.

Table 1. Qualities and characteristics of a humble leader (Vera & Lopez, 2004)

A humble leader:
Is open to new ideas
Wants to learn from others
Avoids being self obsessed
Respects others
Wants to help others develop
Uses mistakes to learn from
Avoids flattery
Takes success with modesty
Has a desire to serve
Seeks advice from others
Is economical
Knows his own limits and wants to correct mistakes

Tangney (2000) examined the definitions of the term “humility” within the fields of philosophy, psychology and theology and her results showed that six qualities in particular stood out (Table 2). Tangney’s work was not focused on leadership per se, but the “humble” qualities that were summarized can certainly be applied to this theme. This particular study gave attention to humility as a virtue in and of itself, regardless of the profession of the individual in question.

Table 2. Qualities and characteristics of a humble individual (Tangney, 2000).

A humble individual:

Notices his own mistakes and limits

Little emphasis on him self, but sees himself as a part of a larger universe

Appreciates all the different ways people contribute

Places his own success in context with the world

Realistic assessment of his own merits and achievements

Open to new ideas and listens to advices from others

If we compare Table 1 and Table 2 we can identify common elements: realistic assessment of one’s own merits, openness to new ideas, ability to admit one’s own mistakes, etc. Morris (2005) believes that humility requires one to believe that there is always another (person, group or force) that is superior to them. In the book *Egonomics* by Marcum and Smith (2008), humility is referred to as one of the key factors allowing for effective leadership, along with honesty and curiosity. Although the authors do not claim that humble leaders must be genuinely religious, they still uphold the view of Morris and Tangney that humble individuals are often at least open to the possibility that a higher power exists.

The third study worth mentioning was carried out by Nielsen, Marrone and Slay (2010), and concentrated on charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership applies to those leaders who are able to use their charm to rally others behind them towards a particular vision that he or she inspires.

“We define humility as a personal quality reflecting the willingness to understand the self (identities, strengths, limitations) combined with perspective in the self’s relationships with others” (Nielsen, Marrone & Slay, 2010).

The definition above is included here because it summarizes and builds on previous definitions made by Exline and Geyer, Tangney and Vera and Lopez. There is thus an apparent consistency throughout definitions of leadership within current literature. Mintzberg, Simon and Basu (2002) also reiterate that leaders need to find a balance between their own interests and those of others (including the company as a whole). Hayes and Comer (2010) additionally point out that humility and modesty are essential to success since humble leaders generate more trust with their followers and are better motivators and encouragers in times of distress.

2.6.3 Comeback of trait theories with focus on humility

Although leaders’ qualities are no longer believed as the be all and end all of companies’ performance, traits such as humility still hold significance in considering the impact of leadership (Andersen, 2006). Trait theories from the middle of the 20th century are not considered sufficient enough to explain what qualities the leader of a modern company in the 21st century needs to have to lead his people to success. Nevertheless, new theories from more recent leadership studies pay attention to qualities of the leader - even though some of these have changed over time (Zaccaro, 2007).

Zaccaro (2007) argues that the trait theories were pushed aside way too soon when new theories first appeared, but they are in fact still very important. An improved perspective is however still clearly needed, especially considering the sheer volume of contrasting views within the landscape of leadership literature. In order to achieve this, researches of leadership qualities need to focus on fewer variables within their studies. Moreover, it is necessary to examine the relationship between particular qualities and their impact on performance. Contextual factors should not be ignored but rather explored in order to take into account the multiplicity of influences that can impact the accomplishments of both leader and company. Lastly, researches need to distinguish between the qualities and the situations, i.e. the qualities that come naturally to leaders and the circumstances that call for qualities that must be temporarily exhibited (“fake it ‘til you make it”) (Zaccaro, 2007). In a recent article from Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-

Metcalf (2005), it is argued that the key difference between the older versus newer trait theories lies in the latter's increasing emphasis on self-knowledge and scrutiny of leaders rather than blind admiration from a distance.

2.6.3.1 Collins' humble leaders

Jim Collins' (2001) seminal book had a compelling impact on the fact that today humility is a focal point when analyzing leadership. His book "Good to Great" helped to bring this quality to the attention of those who study leadership (Morris, Celeste & John, 2005). Although humility is at times viewed as a sign of weakness (Exline & Geyer, 2004), Collins argued that it is one of two critical qualities found in leaders of 11 different companies that were considered excellent and exemplary out of a sample of 1500 (Collins, 2001). Collins' work describes how some companies manage to make the transition from being good to great, as well as why most companies fail in such attempts. Although the author originally took the company as a whole as the scope of analysis, two qualities in particular that related to leadership attracted so much attention from his research team that he decided to take a closer look at the individual level. The findings from this declared that out of the top 11 companies within the study each executive possessed a unique combination of humility and determination (Collins, 2001).

2.6.3.2 Positive psychology within leadership studies

Positive psychology focuses on researching and working with strengths and virtues instead of the individuals' weaknesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Martin Seligman is considered the father of positive psychology, with his book "Learned Optimism" being one of its leading publications. This work seeks to highlight the individuals' good and positive sides instead of focusing on the negative side (Seligman, 1991). This movement has recently made its way over to leadership studies, with increased attention given to "positive" human factors such as optimism, hope, self-esteem, humility and perseverance. These are considered important to the development of the individual (leader or not) as well as how others feel around them (Hannah, Woolfolk & Lord, 2009).

Robert Greenleaf, originally came up with the idea of humility with leaders when he put forward the concept of servant leadership. Humility is one of the three pillars of the theory of servant leadership; the others are service and vision. Key elements of this work have evolved considerably since its initial publication. In short, servant leadership

is about how leaders should want to primarily serve others and place their own needs on the back burner. Self-knowledge and responsibility are key servant leadership, as well as looking inward rather than outward for explanations for circumstances and occurrences (Richardson, 1979). Hypothetically, to be a worthy servant leader a CEO would have to be willing to lower themselves in terms of prestige for the greater good, if it is intended follow this path in its purest form.

Authentic leadership builds on the foundation of what Quinn (2004) describes as a deep self-knowledge and awareness of one's own morality, strengths, confidence, hope and optimism (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Increased emphasis on theories such as servant leadership and authentic leadership can be attributed to the influence of the previously mentioned positive psychology (Goffee & Jonas, 2006). Researches exploring themes of positive psychology within organizations and companies are likely to lead to a better understanding of what it is that drives staff and encourage them to exploit its qualities to the full (Money, Hillenbrand, & da Camera, 2009). A variety of virtues and qualities are considered to be relevant within positive psychology, although these may differ depending on the cultural and national context. Within this study humility is treated as one of the qualities pivotal to leadership (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

2.6.4 The relevance of humility with leaders

Scholars and practitioners have done relatively well in redirecting admiration for idealized heroic leaders to those who are endowed with perhaps more subtle but invaluable measure of character, including humility (Owens and Wilkins, 2012). Countless studies have considered its value and come to the conclusion that humility is a very important factor for successful leadership (Merryman, 2016).

As mentioned before, humility was one of the two top qualities leaders had in companies that were considered excellent (Collins, 2001). A study made by Catalyst in 2014, including 1512 employees, approximately 250 from 6 different countries; Australia, Germany, China, India, the United States and Mexico. All participants were full time employees and women and men were equally represented in the sample. They were supposed to report on the leadership behavior of their managers and how they could make employees feel included (Catalyst, 2014).

The results showed that in five out of six countries, four leadership behaviors made employees feel included; empowerment, humility, courage and accountability.

This extensive study thereby showed that humility is one of the most significant factors, when it comes to making employees feeling included in the workplace. Having employees that feel included is one of the most important factors for a company to be successful (Catalyst, 2014).

From the literature review it is clear that humility is a very relevant quality for leaders. The “female” leadership style has furthermore been described as more humble than the “male” leadership style. It can therefore be concluded that it is relevant to investigate whether female leaders are more humble than their male counterparts.

3 The study

3.1 Methodology

To answer the research question of whether or not women are more humble leaders than men, a quantitative study was performed. The choice of study was in the form of a questionnaire which participants answered online. The reason for why a questionnaire was used was that this design has the potential to reach as many respondents as possible, providing results that give an overview of how the general population perceives the matter. This approach is an effective way of collecting responses from a large sample (Saunders, 2007). No open-ended questions were required to come to a conclusion, as the big picture was the focus area and not a deeper understanding of why individuals answer as they do. The wished outcome of the research was to know whether people, in general, perceive female leaders to convey more behaviors and characteristics that are synonymous to humility than male leaders. The target group of the study was employed people, regardless of education, age or gender.

The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions, so the results were easier to analyze than if open-ended questions would have been used. By using standardized questions, with the same scale for all questions addressing humility, interpretation should be the same by all participants (Saunders, 2007). Furthermore, by using an anonymous questionnaire, participants are more likely to answer honestly (Saunders, 2007). A qualitative research with interviews, for example, would have demanded more direct involvement with participants that can result in less transparency in what is shared. Therefore, a quantitative approach was taken.

The questionnaire was shared on social media (Facebook and LinkedIn) as well as sent out to approximately 100 employees within 5 small and medium sized companies in Denmark and Iceland. The questionnaire was open over the period of 10 days. After the questionnaire was closed data was collected and processed with the tools of Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

There was a total of 18 questions in the questionnaire, including three demographic questions to specify gender, age and level of education. The questions in the study were designed to highlight different qualities describing a humble leader without directly referring to the term. The reason for not mentioning humility directly was because of the risk of different interpretations of participants of the term. The

questionnaire as presented online is attached in Appendix I and distribution of answers for each question in Appendix II.

3.2 Likert scale

To measure the difference in humility between female and male managers, participants were asked to answer how much they agreed or disagreed with 12 questions that each addressed a humble quality. A standard five-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire, with responses ranging from “*strongly agree*” to “*strongly disagree*”, as shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Likert scale

This example of the Likert scale is good:				
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

An important fact regarding the Likert scale is the assumption that there is a linear connection between the different options on the scale. That means that to be able to interpret the difference in humility between men and women we must assume that the interval between strongly agree, and agree, is equal to the interval between neutral, and disagree, as an example. To highlight more the linearity of the scale, numbers between 1 and 5 were used rather than only having words as in the example in Figure 1. An example of the Likert scale used in the questionnaire is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. An example of a question in the questionnaire using the Likert scale

My manager wants to learn from others

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

When interpreting the data, SPSS was used to compute the mean and statistical significance of the variable of humility within each question. The means of different groups, male and female, were then compared to be able to conclude whether women are more humble leaders than men.

3.3 Data

In total, 662 participants answered the questionnaire. The demography of the participants is described in graphs 1-3 below. Significantly more women participated, making up 73% of the respondents. The variable of gender was considered to be able to analyze whether there is a difference in perception of leadership between men and women. When computing the results, this variable was used to establish whether participants rate managers of one gender higher or lower than managers of the opposite gender.

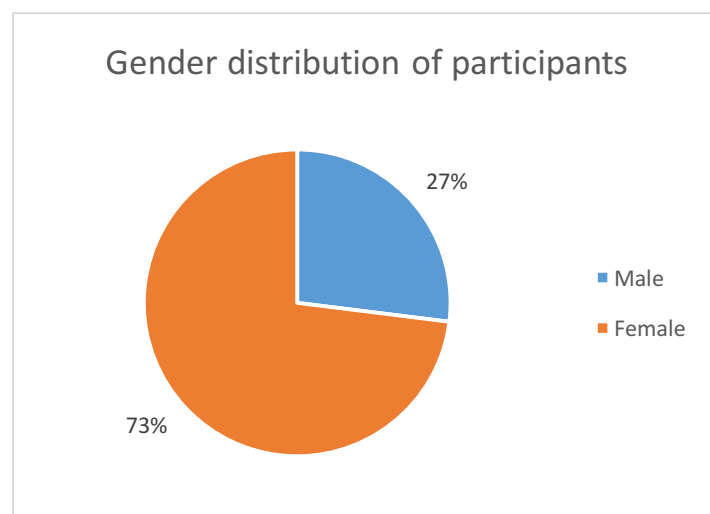


Figure 3. Gender distribution of participants

Age distribution of participants spanned a large range, but 92% of answers came from people aged between 18-54. The age distribution reflects the fact that the questionnaire was accessible online via the social network of the author, as well as to people of working age at the various companies.

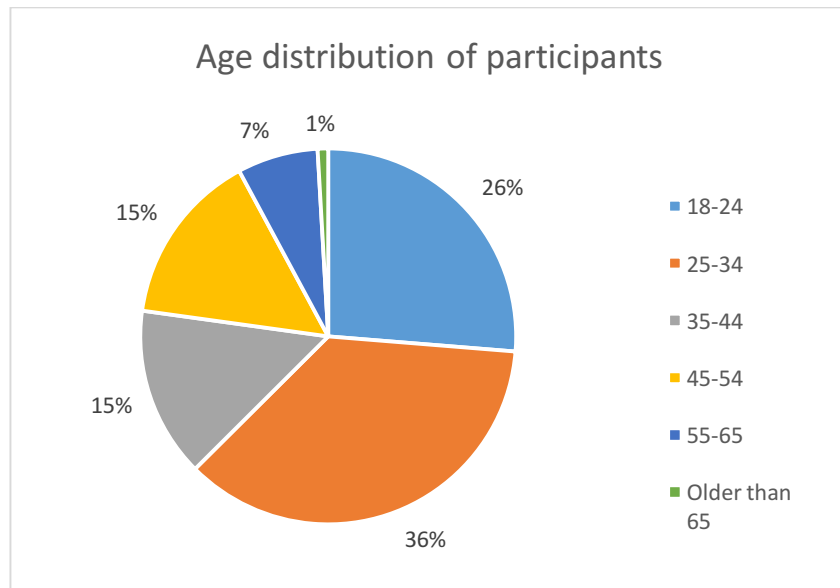


Figure 4. Age distribution of participants.

The educational distribution is portrayed in Figure 5, with the majority of participants having finished at least a bachelor's degree (again reflective of the population sample to which the questionnaire was made available). When analyzing the results, education level was not used as a grouping mechanism but was used when estimating the generalizability of the study.

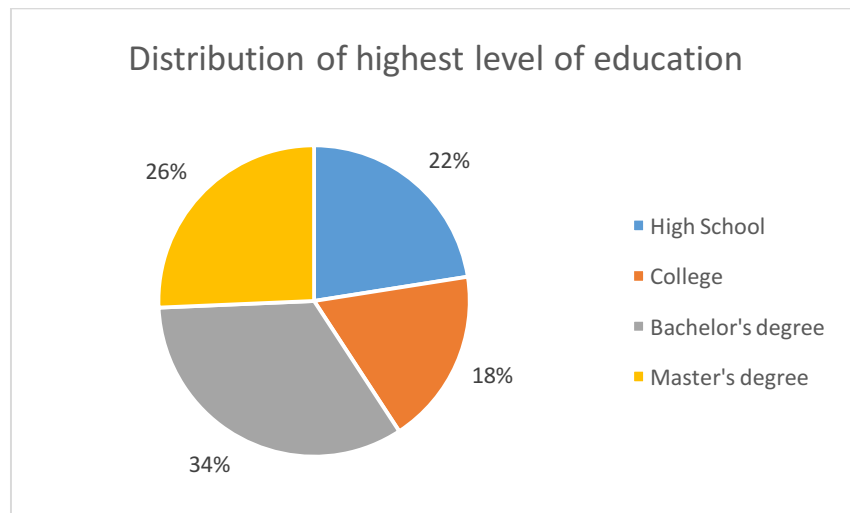


Figure 5. Distribution of highest level of education of participants.

3.4 Validity of the study

The validity of a qualitative research applies to how accurate and reliable the data, tools and processes are in answering the research question (Leung, 2015). In this case, the most important factor is the validity of the questions in the questionnaire. The questions were designed to answer the research question. When formulating the questions, the definitions of a humble leader were used as a framework. As described in Chapter 2.6.2, there are certain qualities a humble leader possesses and participants in the research were asked to answer if that was the case for their closest manager. The work of Vera and Lopez was the primary foundation for the choice of questions, shown in the table below

Table 3. Questions based on behaviors and characteristics indicative of humility

Definition of a humble leader by Vera and Lopez (citation)	Questions in the questionnaire: My closest manager...
Open to new ideas	is open to new ideas
Wants to learn from others	wants to learn from others
Seeks advice from others	seeks advice from others
Avoids being self obsessed	listens to advice from others
Respects others	respects others respects and is careful with other people's feelings
Wants to help others develop	contributes to the development of others
Uses mistakes to learn from	uses his mistakes to learn from
Doesn't take all the credit for success	takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team
Knows his own limits and wants to correct mistakes	knows his/her own limits
Takes success with modesty	is modest when it comes to his/her success
Has a desire to serve	is helpful
<i>Avoids flattery</i>	<i>Did not ask that as it was difficult to phrase</i>
<i>Is economical</i>	<i>Did not ask that as I estimated it of less importance</i>

As Table 3 shows, the questions utilized were based directly on the authors' catalog of indicative behaviors and characteristics pertaining to a humble leader. Two qualities of a humble leader, *avoids flattery* and *is economical* were left out of the questionnaire because of complications with phrasing and overall. Two questions were asked on the quality *respects others*. The first one was simply *My closest manager respects others* but the second one, *My manager respects and is careful with other people's feelings*, was asked to highlight a more feminine quality.

3.5 Reliability of the data

To test and determine the internal consistency and overall reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was used. Using Cronbach's alpha to test for reliability is the most common measure when a questionnaire consists of answers on the Likert scale (Lærd statistics, n.d.). An alpha value between 0,7-1,0 is acceptable and thus a test returning a Cronbach's alpha in that range is considered reliable. The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was calculated in SPSS to be 0,791 which means that the questionnaire was reliable. When looking at the overview of questions, see Table 4, two of the questions were negatively correlated (marked with *) with the other questions and therefore affected the Cronbach's alpha in a negative way. This means that the scale was inconsistent in those two questions with regards to the other ones. To elaborate, if the question *My manager takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team* would be deleted, the Cronbach's alpha would be even higher. The reason for that is that this question is the only one where answering *Strongly disagree* is better than answering *Strongly agree* in every other question using the Likert scale in this questionnaire. Performing the study again, rephrasing that question would therefore be good. It does however not make the questionnaire unreliable, just not as reliable as it could have been.

Table 4. Overview of how different questions affect the reliability of the questionnaire.

Question	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
My manager wants to learn from others	0,752
My manager is helpful	0,749
My manager contributes to the development of others	0,752
My manager seeks advice from others	0,748
My manager uses his mistakes to learn from	0,748
My manager respects others	0,742
My manager knows his/her own limits	0,752
My manager is open to new ideas	0,745
My manager takes the credit for successful work done by their team*	0,833
My manager respects and is careful with other people's feelings	0,750
My manager listens to advice from others	0,742
My manager is modest when it comes to his/her success	0,769
I would rate my manager's leadership skills*	0,917

The last question of the questionnaire was *I would rate my manager's leadership skills* where participants provided a rating between 1 and 10. It is therefore very

understandable that this question affects the Cronbach's alpha, but does not affect the reliability of the questionnaire as such, as it is a different kind of question than the other ones. To conclude, the overall reliability of the study is sound.

It is fair to mention that the reliability of the question *My manager is modest when it comes to his/her success* is not as concrete as the other questions'. This shows in the Cronbach's alpha's analysis and the reason is most likely because of the level of English proficiency of participants. When looking through the data manually, not everyone is consistent in their answers when it comes to this question. My conclusion is that the word *modest* was not understood by all participants and the results of that question should therefore be evaluated with extra care.

3.6 Generalizability of the study

The generalizability of a study determines whether it is possible to apply the results of the study to the rest of the population. The questionnaire was open for everyone to answer and not bound to one specific company, country, age group, education level or gender – an approach which supports the potential for generalizability. The study was shared on social media where it is safe to conclude that majority of answers came from participants living in Iceland and Denmark. People in all age groups participated and the education level of participants was evenly distributed. Significantly more women participated in the study, but male participants still accounted for 178 of the respondents. Generalizability theory explains a generalizability coefficient that is not easy to calculate (Shavelson & Webb, 1991). According to Atilgan (2013), the generalizability coefficient increases up until a sample size of 400, but a sample larger than 400 does not significantly impact the generalizability of a study (Atilgan, 2013). Based on the distribution in background variables of participants and with a sample of 662, it is possible to conclude that the study is generalizable – at least within the contexts of Denmark and Iceland.

3.7 Results

The research question involves the difference between male and female leaders and thus participants were asked to answer whether their closest manager was male or female. 16% of participants did not have a manager and were instructed not to answer any further questions. The split between male and female managers was even; 42% of

participants had a woman as their closest manager and 42% had a man as their closest manager.

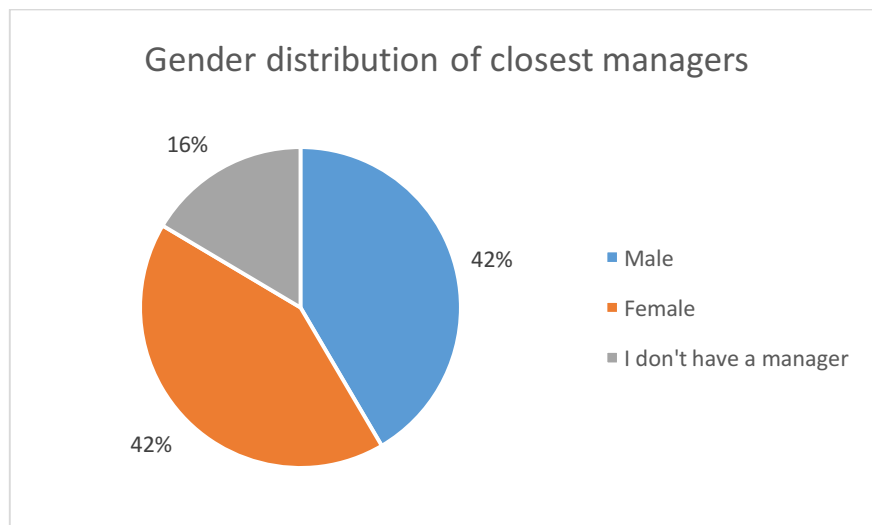


Figure 6. Gender distribution of closest managers.

Not directly related to the research question, but of interest to the topic of gender distribution in the high level positions, participants were also asked to answer whether the CEO at the company where they worked was male or female. The results showed that 77% of companies had a male CEO and 23% a female CEO.

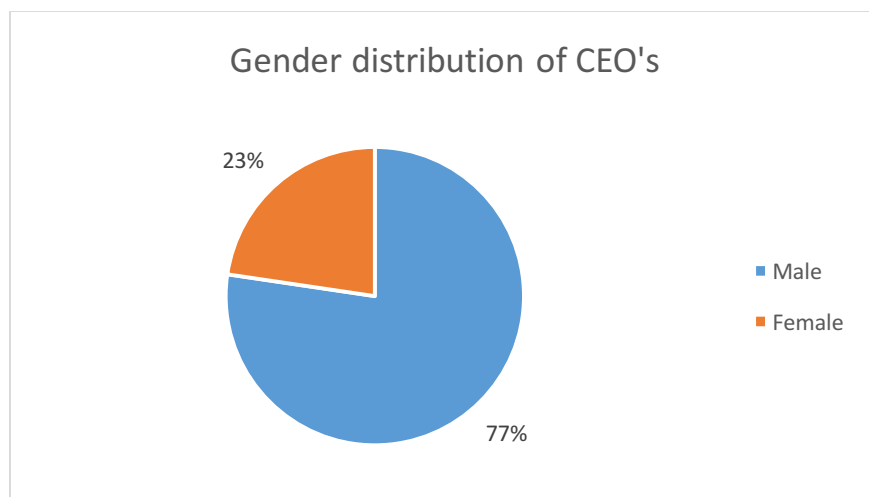


Figure 7. Gender distribution of CEOs.

To tackle the question of whether women are more humble leaders than men, the data from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS. Only data from participants that had a manager was used in the analysis. Furthermore, data from 5 participants was excluded since they did not answer one or more questions. Data was also deleted from 13

individuals that clearly misunderstood the scale, elaborated further in Chapter 4.1. Limitations. The total sample size was therefore N=534. The average scores of every question between female and male managers was compared and an independent-sample t-test was performed. The scores in the questionnaire ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represents *strongly agree* and 5 *strongly disagree*. As mentioned previously in relation to reliability within the questionnaire, two questions are negatively correlated with the other questions and should therefore be interpreted differently. In other words, a lower average represents a better outcome in every question except the two questions marked with * in Table 5 where a higher average is better.

Table 5. Statistical results on the difference between male managers and female managers

My closest manager...	Average score - Male manager	Average score - Female manager	Mean difference	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
wants to learn from others	2,37	2,37	0,00	0,000	1,000
is helpful	2,06	2,02	0,04	0,376	0,707
contributes to the development of others	2,27	2,15	0,11	1,114	0,266
seeks advice from others	2,31	2,28	0,03	0,288	0,774
uses his mistakes to learn from	2,33	2,25	0,07	0,739	0,460
respects others	2,04	2,02	0,02	0,178	0,859
knows his/her own limits	2,38	2,41	-0,03	-0,254	0,800
is open to new ideas	2,10	2,02	0,07	0,719	0,473
takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team*	3,49	3,35	0,13	1,210	0,227
respects and is careful with other people's feelings	2,41	2,28	0,13	1,189	0,235
listens to advice from others	2,30	2,17	0,12	1,258	0,209
is modest when it comes to his/her success	2,48	2,34	0,15	1,499	0,134
I would rate my manager's leadership skills*	7,19	7,25	-0,06	-0,310	0,757

To estimate the results, the difference in the average scores is compared, shown as *Mean difference* in Table 5. A positive mean difference (for all questions except the ones marked with *) represents that the female manager had a better average score, while a negative mean difference means that the male manager had a better average score. For questions marked with *, a positive mean difference represents that the male managers had a better average score than their male counterparts and vice versa. The results show that the mean difference is in favor of female managers in 9 out of 12 questions. The male managers score better when it comes to 2 out of 12 questions, namely *knowing their own limits* and *not taking credit for the work done by their team*. In one instance, *My manager wants to learn from others*, male and female managers score equally well. From

these results, one could conclude that female leaders are more humble than male leaders. These numbers can however not be interpreted without looking at the statistical significance of the results. The significance depends on the values shown in Table 5, specifically in the column marked Sig. (2-tailed). A two-tailed test assesses both whether a mean is significantly greater or lower than the mean it is compared to. In this case, it tests whether the difference in scores of male and female leaders is large enough to be able to conclude with certainty that there is a any difference between male and female leaders. For the difference to be statistically significant the Sig. (2-tailed) value needs to be less than 0,05 given a 95% confidence interval. When looking at the results summarized in Table 5 no question has a Sig. (2-tailed) value of less than 0,05 and therefore there is no significant difference between a male and a female leader. It is therefore not possible to conclude that women are more humble leaders than men.

The results are quite decisive as the two tailed t-test shows that there is a very small difference between the two means. The conclusion is therefore that there is not a significant difference between male and female leaders when it comes to humility. It is however fair to mention the fact that in 10 out of 13 questions, the female managers get a better score on average. It gives a certain indication even though it is not statistically significant.

3.8 Further results

73% of participants were female and 27% were male. To determine if there was a difference in perception of managers between depending on the gender of the participant, two more t-tests were performed in SPSS using the gender variable as a grouping mechanism in addition to the manager gender variable.

Answers from male participants with a manager, N=147, was analyzed using SPSS and the results are shown in Table 6. The results are interpreted the same way as previously, namely with a focus on the *Mean difference* and the statistical significance, *Sig. (2-tailed)*. According to these results, female managers have a better average score in 11 out of 12 questions and have the same average score in 1 out of 12 questions. Male managers do not score better in any question based on answers from male participants only.

Table 6. Statistical results on the difference between male managers and female managers according to male participants.

Male participants My closest manager...	Average score - Male manager	Average score - Female manager	Mean difference	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
wants to learn from others	2,26	2,12	0,14	0,723	0,471
is helpful	2,06	1,94	0,12	0,631	0,529
contributes to the development of others	2,23	2,08	0,15	0,731	0,466
seeks advice from others	2,27	2,06	0,21	1,044	0,298
uses his mistakes to learn from	2,32	2,12	0,20	1,028	0,306
respects others	2,00	1,72	0,28	1,512	0,133
knows his/her own limits	2,38	2,26	0,12	0,659	0,511
is open to new ideas	2,00	1,68	0,32	1,778	0,077
takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team*	3,44	3,44	0,00	0,015	0,988
respects and is careful with other people's feelings	2,34	1,88	0,46	2,303	0,023
listens to advice from others	2,15	1,92	0,23	1,266	0,208
is modest when it comes to his/her success	2,38	2,20	0,18	0,971	0,333
I would rate my manager's leadership skills*	7,38	7,58	-0,20	-0,642	0,522

When it comes to the statistical significance, there is a significant difference between male and female managers when it comes to *respecting and being careful with other people's feelings*. It is therefore possible to conclude that to male participants, female managers are significantly better than male managers at *respecting and being careful with other people's feelings*. Female managers are also substantially more *open to new ideas* than their male counterparts, although this cannot be statistically proven in this case. Based on the results, there is a strong indication that men find female leaders more humble than male leaders. Furthermore, men rate female managers on average higher than male managers when it comes to overall leadership skills.

The same analytical procedure was followed using data from female participants only, N=387. Results are shown in Table 7. When compared to the results of male participants, it shows that the *Mean difference* is in general smaller in the case of female participants. That means that women perceive the difference between male and female managers to be less than how men perceive the difference. Women do furthermore give male managers a better score in 3 out of 13 questions compared to 0 questions in the case of male participants. This difference is however not significant and should not be used to draw conclusions; but rather serve as an indication of certain patterns found with the study.

Table 7. Statistical results on the difference between male managers and female managers according to female participants.

Female participants My closest manager...	Average score - Male manager	Average score - Female manager	Mean difference	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
wants to learn from others	2,44	2,43	0,01	0,060	0,952
is helpful	2,06	2,04	0,02	0,140	0,889
contributes to the development of others	2,29	2,17	0,12	1,002	0,317
seeks advice from others	2,34	2,33	0,00	0,090	0,929
uses his mistakes to learn from	2,34	2,29	0,05	0,422	0,673
respects others	2,06	2,09	-0,03	-0,219	0,827
knows his/her own limits	2,38	2,44	-0,06	-0,554	0,580
is open to new ideas	2,15	2,10	0,05	0,389	0,697
takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team	3,51	3,33	0,18	1,409	0,160
respects and is careful with other people's feelings	2,45	2,38	0,08	0,497	0,619
listens to advice from others	2,38	2,23	0,15	1,252	0,211
is modest when it comes to his/her success	2,54	2,37	0,17	1,422	0,156
I would rate my manager's leadership skills	7,08	7,17	-0,09	-0,345	0,731

Outside the scope of this particular study, the data collected can be used to reflect on further questions. One being how much men and women agree with the statements addressing humility within leaders. The average score of male and female participants was analyzed, independent of male and female managers, and is presented in Table 8. When looking at the mean difference of the average scores it shows that male participants provide a better average score in all 12 questions addressing humility than female participants. Three of those differences are statistically significant and it gives the indication that men in general perceive more humble qualities in their managers than women do.

Table 8. Difference in average score provided by male and female participants

My closest manager...	Average score - Male particip.	Average score - Female particip.	Mean difference	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
wants to learn from others	2,21	2,43	-0,22	-2,018	0,044
is helpful	2,02	2,05	-0,03	-0,257	0,797
contributes to the development of others	2,18	2,22	-0,05	-0,401	0,688
seeks advice from others	2,20	2,33	-0,14	-1,203	0,230
uses his mistakes to learn from	2,25	2,31	-0,06	-0,492	0,623
respects others	1,90	2,08	-0,18	-1,608	0,109
knows his/her own limits	2,34	2,42	-0,08	-0,705	0,481
is open to new ideas	1,89	2,12	-0,23	-2,177	0,030
takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team	3,44	3,41	0,03	0,251	0,802
respects and is careful with other people's feelings	2,18	2,41	-0,23	-1,898	0,058
listens to advice from others	2,07	2,29	-0,22	-2,076	0,039
is modest when it comes to his/her success	2,32	2,44	-0,12	-1,142	0,254
I would rate my manager's leadership skills	7,45	7,13	0,32	1,724	0,086

The last question in the questionnaire was *I would rate my manager's leadership skills* on a scale from 1 to 10. This question was asked to be able to establish which of the humble qualities are more important than others when it comes to being a good leader. A correlation matrix was calculated between all the variables and the results are shown in Table 9 have sorted these from the most important (from the top) to the least important (at the very bottom). All the questions except one (marked with *) are negatively correlated, which means that a lower score in the questions has a positive impact on the manager's leadership rating. All the correlation coefficients were statistically significant with a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0,000.

Table 9. Correlation between leadership rating and humble qualities

Correlation between I would rate my manager's leadership skills and:	Pearson Correlation
My manager listens to advice from others	-0,675
My manager contributes to the development of others	-0,647
My manager uses his mistakes to learn from	-0,635
My manager wants to learn from others	-0,634
My manager is helpful	-0,616
My manager seeks advice from others	-0,612
My manager knows his/her own limits	-0,601
My manager respects and is careful with other people's feelings	-0,598
My manager respects others	-0,596
My manager is open to new ideas	-0,546
My manager is modest when it comes to his/her success	-0,535
My manager takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team*	0,243

The quality *My manager listens to advice from others* has the biggest impact on the rating of the manager with a correlation of -0,675. This can be interpreted as the most important of the 12 qualities to have as a manager to get a good rating as a leader. The results show that qualities like *seeking and listening to advice, helping, wanting to learn from mistakes* is more important than *being respectful, modest and not taking credit*. There are similarities with the top 6 and bottom 6 qualities and so it was decided to categorize them as presented in Table 10 and Table 11.

Table 10. The human, relatable leader

Category 1: The human, relatable leader

My manager listens to advice from others
 My manager contributes to the development of others
 My manager uses his mistakes to learn from
 My manager wants to learn from others
 My manager is helpful
 My manager seeks advice from others

Table 11. The respectful, modest leader

Category 2: The respectful, modest leader

My manager knows his/her own limits
 My manager respects and is careful with other people's feelings
 My manager respects others
 My manager is open to new ideas
 My manager is modest when it comes to his/her success
 My manager takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team

It can be argued that the more “human, relatable leader” is likely to be better valued as a leader than the “respectful and modest leader”. The reason for this might be that the qualities in category 1 are all connected to certain actions and therefore easier to measure and realize than the qualities in category 2. Another possibility is that being “relatable” is better perceived than “modest” due perhaps to the balancing act that is required of leaders – they must be diplomatic and yet still strong. Although it is logical to assume that being relatable requires a level of modesty (not thinking oneself to be greater than others), it could be that the term “modest” tends to be more likely to evoke an image to reminiscent of weakness.

4 Discussion

Having reviewed a substantial amount of theories and studies on leadership, humility, female and male leadership styles, some things are more clear than others. Humility is in fact a relevant trait that leaders should strive for, and is valid for both men and women. The female leadership style capitalizes on soft values, suggesting that women should be more humble leaders than men. The results from the quantitative study performed, showed however that there was not a significant difference between male and female leaders when it comes to humility.

The results are in line with the study made by Eagly and Carli in 2007, i.e. there isn't much of a difference between male and female leadership styles. The main difference that they pointed out was that female managers were more involved in the working environment by listening to people's ideas and making them feel included. They argued that men weren't as much involved as the female managers. According to my study, however, there isn't a significant difference when asked about those things. The questions: *My manager seeks advice from others*, *My manager listens to advice from others* and *My manager is open to new ideas*, return similar results for men and women. Women get a higher score in all of these questions but the difference isn't significant.

Standardization is one of the biggest challenges women face regarding leadership roles (Northouse, 2013). It can therefore be argued that one of the biggest development of female leadership my study supports, is the diminished standardization. Catalyst conducted a study in 2005 where women were considered better at showing support and appreciation than men. The biggest delimitation with the study was that the responses might have been influenced by standardization. The question *My manager respects and is careful with other people's feelings* shows no significant difference between female and male leaders. This question describes a quality that could be seen as a feminine quality, but according to my study people don't seem to look at it like that.

However, it's interesting to take a closer look at the answers from the male participants, because when it comes to the statistical significance, there is a significant difference between male and female managers regarding this question. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that male participants believe that female leaders are significantly better than male managers at respecting and being careful with other people's feelings. These results show that standardization might still be relevant with men and not women, and that women have come a long way since the study in 2005, where women stated

that they were much better in all the female factors than male managers and also considered men to be better in the male dominated factors.

A Catalyst study from 2007 where women accounted for 28,3% of all executive positions so the fact that women account for 23% of CEOs jobs in my study could be considered a good development. Therefore, it is difficult to find out if the challenges, like the glass ceiling and the pipeline theory are still as relevant as they were before. According to Eagly and Carli, the glass ceiling is outdated. They believe that women have been able to break their way through the glass ceiling and are gaining more momentum. While other scholars, for example Baxter and Wright say that it is still very relevant, as women are not equal to men in CEO jobs. But as the pipeline theory explains, this development just takes time, women's progress is slower than men's and in the end women will have the same power as men (Rodrigues, 2011). Another aspect of this discussion, is the fact that women might prioritize differently than men. Women might prefer having more time with the family and therefore not seek the highest positions. With that taken into account, I consider 23% of CEO jobs held by females a relatively high split.

Much of the literature reviewed points to the fact that women are more humble leaders. Burke and Collins (2015) showed for instance that women were particularly more effective than men when it came to coaching, communication and development of others. Maume and Ruppanner (2015) also argued that women were more likely to help their subordinates to develop. My study did not, however, show a significance difference when it came to the question *My manager contributes to the development of others*, just as with every other question. Why there was no significant difference between male and female leaders is unclear, but one thought is that the literature reviewed was of studies conducted in various countries of the world, while my study had mostly participants from Iceland and Denmark.

Women in leadership have come a long way over the last decades and so has society with gender equality being of more and more importance. However, it is naïve to generalize such a statement. In the western world, Nordics especially, this has certainly been the case but there still is a long way to go in most parts of the world. The results from my study show that women get a higher overall rating, without taking humility into account, although the results are not statistically significant. Furthermore, it shows that women account for 50% of management positions and 23% of CEO positions. It is hard

to believe that this would be the case for countries in the Middle East, to take an example. The results do therefore not reflect the global state of the difference between male and female leadership. It can furthermore explain the difference in my results compared to the literature review.

It would be interesting to perform the same study in other parts of the world to see whether women are perceived more humble leaders elsewhere. The Nordics countries are known for being world leading when it comes to gender equality and the global gender gap index 2016 reports that Iceland is in fact at the top of the list, being the country where gender equality is the most (World Economic Forum, 2016).

I see the results from my study in favor of gender equality, not in favor of women and not in favor of men. They show that men are perceived humble just as women, which means that it is an accepted behavior, and in fact most valued, to ask for advice. The idea of the great man that doesn't need help or advice is outdated and men don't have to be afraid to ask for help or show soft qualities. By conducting the same research in the Middle East, it wouldn't surprise me that female leaders would be perceived as significantly more humble. The conclusion from such results would not be that women are more humble in the Middle East than in the Nordics, but more likely that men do not practice the qualities of humility to the same extent in Middle East as men do in the Nordic countries. This is, of course, just a speculation without any concrete evidence whatsoever, namely a discussion. To explain the equal score between male and female leaders, my thought is that just as women, men have in fact come a long way when it comes to leadership, at least in the Nordics.

The idea that women all have so-called "female qualities" (and men "male qualities") is perhaps the root of the problem. There are plenty of men who are more sensitive than certain women, and women that are more assertive than men. To define qualities as either male or female is in my opinion not what brings us closer to gender equality or makes one a better leader. I think everyone can agree that having a leader with the humble qualities mentioned in my study is a good thing. Those qualities are positive to have and don't draw a picture of a woman rather than a man, in my opinion. The interesting part is why those qualities haven't been valued or mentioned in leadership studies until recently.

Majority of recent studies mention humility as an important factor for successful companies. When the first leadership theories appeared, humility as such was not at all a

feasible quality for leaders even though the first theories, trait theories, focused on the qualities of the leader. Their focus was on the leader, or as the great man theory explains, the hero. At that time, qualities like confidence, masculinity and control were the most important qualities a leader could have and women were not mentioned at all in that context.

Theories like behavioral theories, situational theories, transactional leadership and transformational leadership, also focus on the leader. And humility is not mentioned in the theories any way. Transactional leadership is all about how the leader controls his or her staff, how performance is the only thing that matters and therefore the leader uses rewards or punishment to drive people. This way of leading proved to hinder development of companies and leadership theories adapted. Transformational leadership focus on that leaders need greater involvement with their employees if they are going to be successful. But transformational leadership is also all about the leader, how the leader is able to create a spark with his followers, how the leader is able to convince them and inspire them.

For a leader to be humble, he needs to be able to put the interest of his or her followers above his or her own, as theories like authentic leadership and servant leadership focus on. With those theories and positive psychology, we are kind of back at the beginning of the first leadership theories, we are focusing again on the qualities of the leader - just with a different approach. Now, the focus is on the positive aspects such as hope, humility, self-esteem and how employees feel being around the leader.

I don't think that just recently, humble qualities became important to leaders. I rather believe that just recently, these traits and qualities were categorized and labelled. A great leader in the past could just as well have some of those qualities, but in addition to the strong and firm qualities, that were highlighted at the time. In my opinion, a great leader has natural born qualities along with the ability to adapt to ever-changing needs of those who rely on them where the humble qualities can fit in both categories. Women and men can both be humble just as women and men can both be assertive. In my opinion, it is the balance of these two labelled qualities that make a great leader.

4.1 Limitations

Like all studies, this one has certain limitations. Since there was a difference in how female and male participants answered the questions, it would have been best to have 50% female participants and 50% male participants, but the study had 73% female participants and 27% male participants. This factor could have influenced the results of the study drastically, especially since the data indicates that men tend to rate female managers on average higher than men. This means that if there had been more men, women might have gotten a higher score that could have resulted in a statistically significant result, and thus the conclusion would have been that women (in this case) are perceived to be more humble leaders than men.

Another limitation is in the limited selection of questions used to represent the various dimensions of humility, as this was essentially founded primarily on the work presented by Vera and Lopez (2004). Tangney (2000) has also achieved an extensive study and her results were very much in line with Vera's and Lopez definitions, but she had an extra focus on religion. This is based on the assumption that it is highly influential to shaping a truly humble individual if one views one's self as part of a larger universe and greater plan. This assumption is reflected in the work of Morris (2005), who also puts forward that humble individuals must consider that something else is superior to them. I did not see this as an important factor, but if I would have been 100% objective I could have added a question related to religion, especially since many others that defined humility believed that religion or at least the possibility that a higher power exists was a part of a humble leader. The Nordic countries are however not likely to be highly religious and a question about religion would be considered odd in the context of leadership.

As explained in Chapter 3.2, the Likert scale is not a perfect measure of experiences. If ever repeated, a different scale would possibly be employed. However, when forming the questionnaire, a better solution than the Likert scale was not found. Another limitation was in how some respondents misunderstood the scale, and reversed the strongly agree and strongly disagree. Such misunderstandings are assumed on the bases that there are stark inconsistencies in the responses of certain participants. For instance, some answered the questions by rating their manager with a 5, i.e. strongly disagree at every question and a 1, i.e. strongly agree when the negative correlation question was, but rated their managers' leadership skills at 10. Due to that

problem these answers were deleted, otherwise it would have skewed the results of the study.

Another misunderstanding came up in interpretations of the question *My manager is modest when it comes to his/her success*, which was reflected in the Cronbach's alpha of this question. The reason for this might be that most of the participants were either of Danish or Icelandic nationality and thus not native speakers of English. This consideration has an impact in weighting the value of the results, due largely to the fact that choices of language (the choice of vocabulary, structure, etc.) has some nuances that a native speaker is more likely to be aware of. It is thus logical that someone answering a questionnaire (within which they cannot check if their interpretations of questions is in line with what the researcher intended) in a language other than one's own can mean a greater likelihood of misunderstanding. That being said, misinterpretations of questions is a common feature of studies in general, even when all involved are of the same nationality and share the same mother tongue. This essentially has to do with our individual and complex processes of translating the words of another into what we think they mean. An additional limitation of survey-based research is that respondents often do not give enough time and/or consideration to providing truthful responses, and instead have the tendency to provide uninformed response, in which they essentially select an answer at random or based on what they ideally would want to be the case (Saunders, 2007).

During the construction of the questionnaire it was thought to be a good idea to have at least one question negatively correlated, i.e. reversed from the others, *My manager takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team*. There were however some inconsistencies with that question, as was seen in the Cronbach's alpha, and the question made the questionnaire less reliable. A better alternative would have been to keep the same scoring and rephrase the question as follows: *My manager doesn't take the credit for successful work done by his/her team*.

4.2 Further research

In regards to implications to further research, going forward the author would like to apply Rowatt's (2002) focus on uncovering activities related to self-other biases and aspects of humility. While this study has drawn examples of how leadership behavior and perception (on the part of others than the leader) can indicate how much weight

gender still has to leadership, what could be further developed are more long-term and pervasive studies based on specific company cases. It would be insightful to compare the views of leaders in such matters in relation to those of their subordinates and/or superiors. This would provide a different type of analytical dimension to the concept of humility, due to the emphasis on whether leaders tend to rate themselves better, the same or more harshly than their coworkers do. Such research would yield a deeper understanding of the subject.

5 Conclusion

The difference between male and female leaders has been the topic of many studies throughout the years. The first leadership theories were solely focused on male leaders, with females completely disregarded. Thankfully, this view is changing and female leaders are starting to be more and more prominent in today's society. The most recent leadership literature focuses on a relatively new treatment of humility and its significance to leadership.

Every leader has their own unique leadership style, although certain patterns do exist within commercial and political settings. One might assume that women would fit the description of a humble leader better than men. The results of the study show, however, that there is not a significant difference between male and female leaders. There is an indication that female leaders may possess more humble qualities, although this is perhaps too generalized a statement to ever make with full certainty. That being said, a better understanding of how gender is perceived in the workplace is valid to human resource management and leadership practices. In light of the literature discussed within this paper, what could be of interest for future studies is how leaders (male and female) manage to balance the need to be humble and at the same time powerful. Whether men and women achieve this balance through similar or distinct behaviors could provide more insight into concernment of gender and leadership studies.

It is evident that women have come a long way when it comes to leadership. Women hold 50% of management positions, according to this study, and are on the right track with CEO positions as well. Society's treatment of men has thankfully also come a long way. Less traditional and more equal demands and benefits are offered to both men and women. Especially in certain countries, differences in salaries, childcare leave, work hours, etc. are more equal than ever, suggesting an egalitarian approach to gender. It is hoped that leaders/managers can learn from one another not based on wanting to look up to a man or a woman, but rather to someone of exemplary character.

Coming back to the main objective of this thesis, it can be concluded that women are rated on average higher than men when it comes to this study's analysis of humility, although this difference is not significant enough to be considered reliable. The male participants in the study tended to rate their female leaders better than women rate

their female leaders, which could indicate that women leaders are actually viewed by men in a more positive light than by their female colleagues. Looking at the most important qualities in a leader, seeking and listening to advice from others, contributing to development of others and learning from mistakes have been found to be the most substantial indicators of humility, thus suggesting that the “great man” concept is not the preferred leader of today. Today’s leader can be either a man or a woman. Today’s leader seeks advice. Today’s leader learns from their mistakes and those of others. The quality of leadership should therefore not be judged by gender, but by an individual’s ability to adapt to the ever-changing needs of those who rely on them; including the need to balance between both humble and assertive traits.

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Appendix I: Survey questions

Questionnaire about Leadership

When you answer these questions you should think about your closest manager at your current workplace

* Required

1. **My gender ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Do not want to specify

2. **My age ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-65
- ☐ Older than 65

3. **My highest level of education completed ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ High school
- ☐ College
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (or similar)
- ☐ Master's Degree (or similar)

4. **My closest manager is ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ I don't have a manager (If you check here, you don't have to answer more questions)

5. **The CEO of my company is**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

6. **My manager wants to learn from others**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

7. **My manager is helpful**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

8. **My manager contributes to the development of others**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

9. **My manager seeks advice from others**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

10. **My manager uses his mistakes to learn from**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

11. **My manager respects others**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

12. **My manager knows his/her own limits**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

13. **My manager is open to new ideas**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

14. **My manager takes the credit for successful work done by his/her team**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

15. **My manager respects and is careful with other people's feelings**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

16. **My manager listens to advice from others**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

17. **My manager is modest when it comes to his/her success**

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

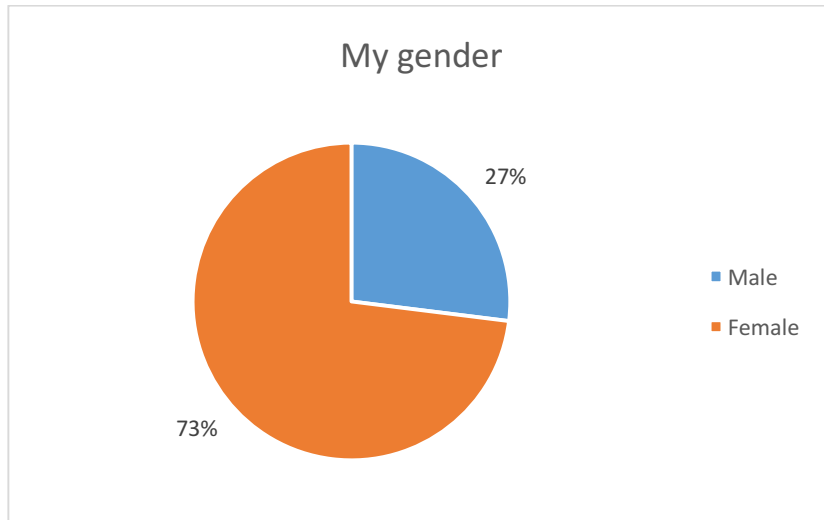
18. I would rate my manager's leadership skills

Mark only one oval.

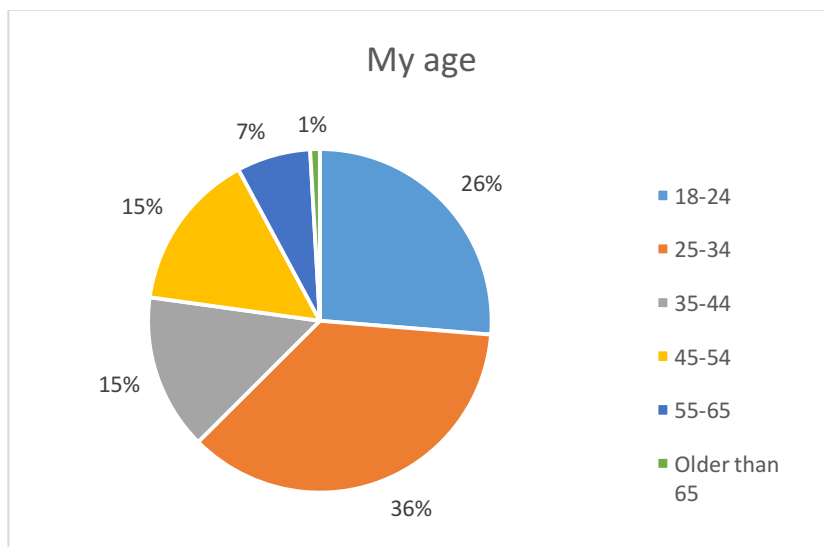
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Lowest rating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Highest rating

Appendix II: Distribution of survey answers

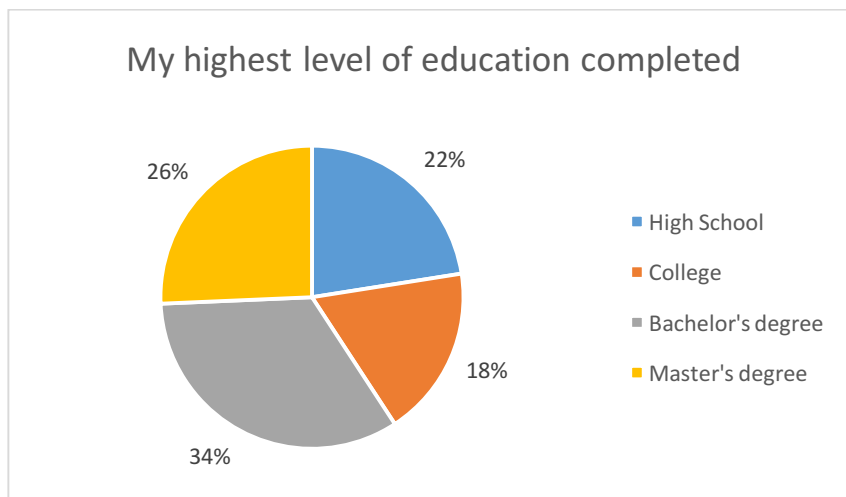
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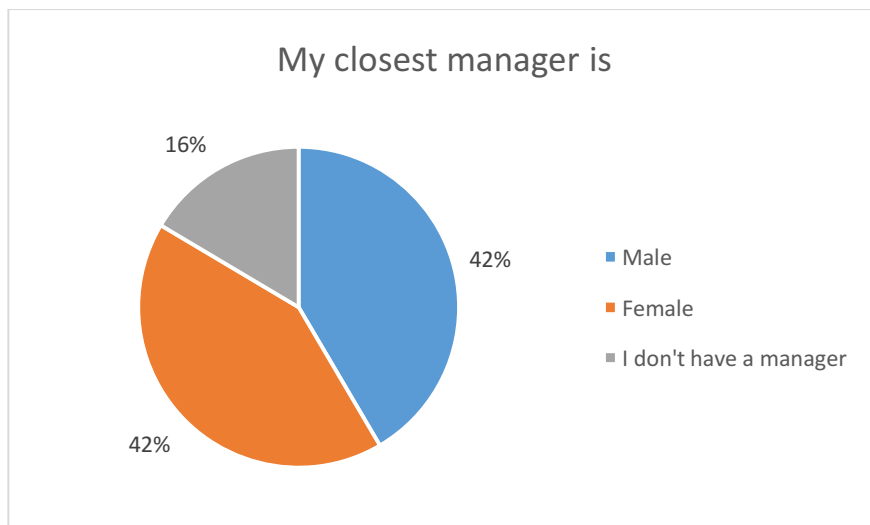
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Question 3:



Question 4:



Question 5:



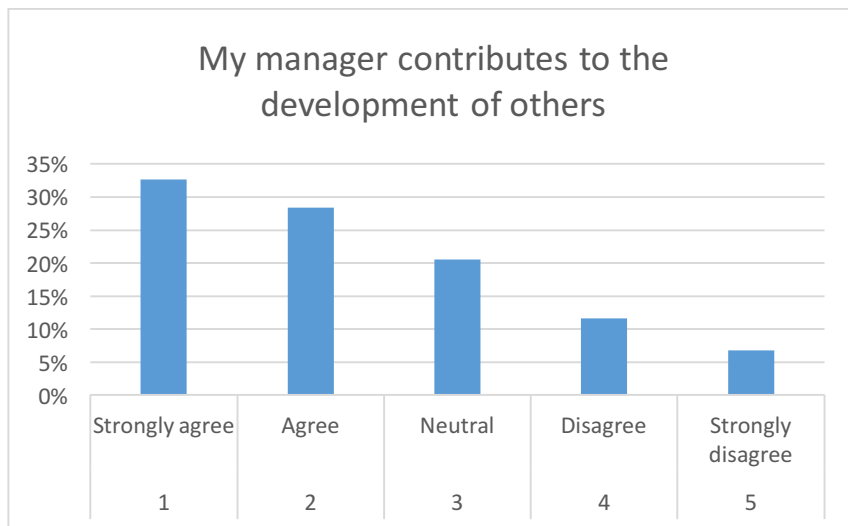
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Question 7:



Question 8:



Question 9:



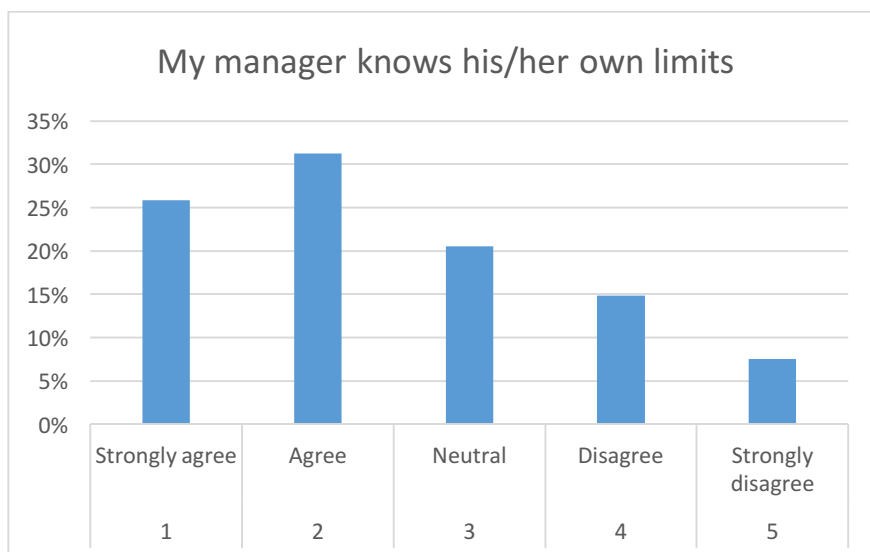
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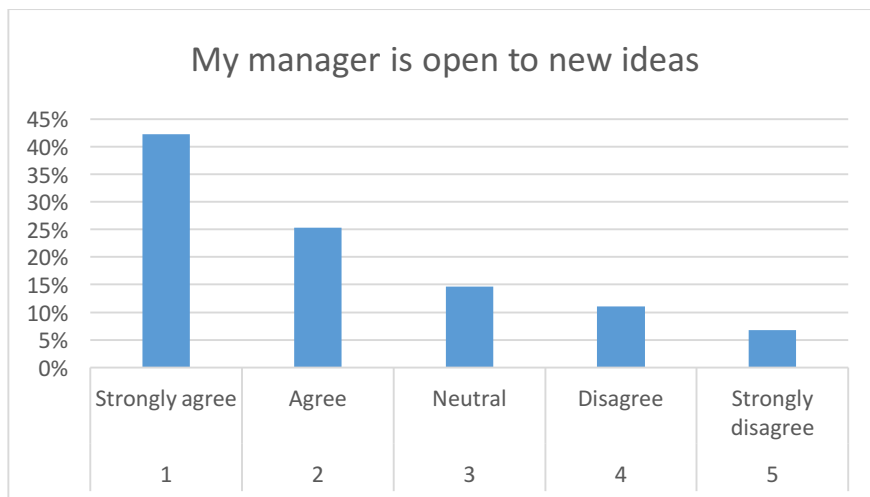
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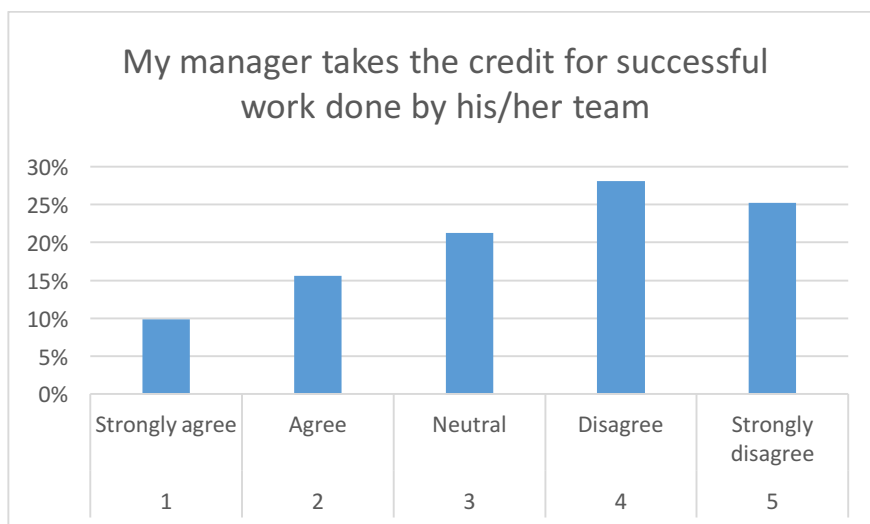
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Question13:



Question 14:



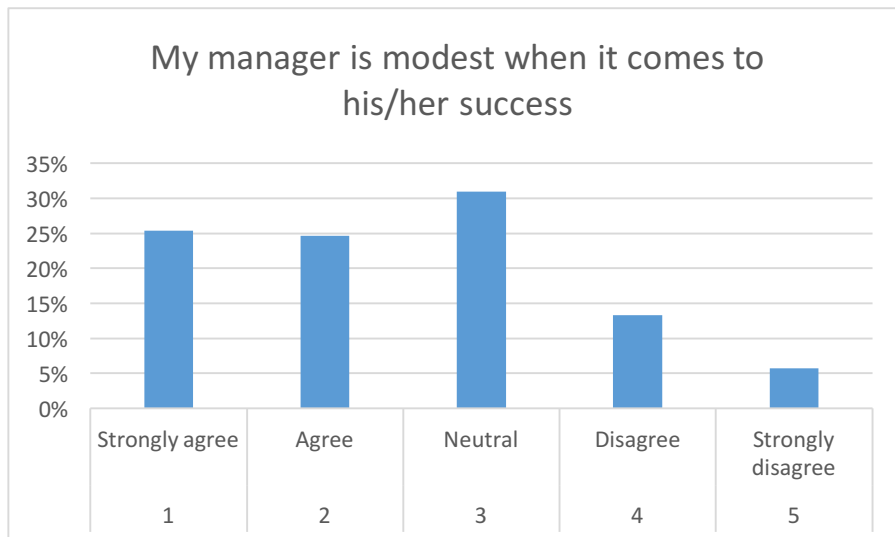
Question 15:



Question 16:



Question 17:



Question 18:

