The Influence of Leadership Trainings on Leader Identity Development

Master Thesis

to obtain the academic degree of

Master of Science

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General Management
STATUTORY DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted is my own unaided work, that I have not used other than the sources indicated, and that all direct and indirect sources are acknowledged as references.

This printed thesis is identical with the electronic version submitted.

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Abstract

Within the current fast-changing organizations the importance of developing a strong leader identity has been increasing steadily. Organizations invest a lot of money and resources into development programs of their leaders. However, there exists only limited evidence about the influence of leadership trainings on the development of the leader identity. In fact, plenty of research about transfer of training exists, but there is only limited evidence about the connection to leader identity development. Therefore, this master thesis examines how the transfer of training knowledge can influence the leader identity development after leadership trainings. The selected qualitative research indicates a positive influence of the leadership training on the identity development, especially in connection with triggered reflection and self-analysis. The results show the high potential of leadership trainings if they aim to develop leader identities.

Keywords: leadership training, leader identity development, transfer of training, meaning of leadership, reflection
1. Introduction

The introduction to the research topic of this master thesis is structured as follows: first of all, the problem is stated and in a further subchapter the aim of this research project is defined. Then, the research question is formulated and concluding the first chapter, the structure of this thesis is outlined.

1.1. Problem statement

“Leadership development is a lifetime journey, not a quick trip.” (John C. Maxwell)

In recent years, the trend has shown that leadership is of rising importance. Complex structures in companies ask for leaders who develop their skills and personality further (Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017; Day & Harrison, 2007). Leadership development trainings are emerging and the companies are willing to spend huge amounts of money on these trainings. However, as it is stated in the Global Human Capital Report of Deloitte, 40% of the respondents believed that the training provided only “some value” and 24% said that the leadership trainings provided only little or no value to the company (Deloitte, 2016: 28). Previous research confirms the result of this report and scientific studies highlighted that only a small degree of training activity is transferred to the workplace (Beer, Finnström, & Schrader, 2016; Saks & Belcourt, 2006). This problem is already known for some years, therefore many researchers tried to solve the issue by developing models and theories which should improve the degree of transfer of training (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Lim & Lane, 2006). A special emphasis was put on the definition of factors which enhance or hinder the transfer. Although there is already so much knowledge about these factors and about transfer of training, the benefit for companies by sending their leaders to leadership development trainings is still very limited. Actually, this is a big problem in businesses nowadays, as on the one side it is known that leader development is necessary, but on the other side it is shown that formal trainings do not lead to the desired result.

Another research approach in the field of leader development shows that during the life time of a leader it is not only important to further develop skills and theoretical knowledge, but also the leader’s personal identity (Day & Harrison, 2007; Hammond et al., 2017). The nascent research about leader identity development states that a leader has to develop his or her personality and also his understanding of leadership in order to improve his or her leadership abilities.
However, for companies it is questionable how they can foster such an identity development, as a leader identity is described as a social construct, which further develops by interactions with other leaders and followers (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Few researchers up until now have dealt with this question. For example, Warhurst (2012) examined identity formation during an MBA program. Thereby, he showed that besides the direct transfer of learned tools or methods of a leadership training, there should also be informal learning processes, which can influence the leader identity (Warhurst, 2012). Especially, the point that participants of leadership trainings started to redefine themselves as leaders, showed that there can be an influence of leadership trainings on leader identity development. However, there is still a lack of research on how this actually happens and what the role of the defined triggers of transfer of training in this issue is.

Due to this insight, this master thesis is dealing with the outlined problems. For the examination of the influence of the leadership trainings on the leader identity development a qualitative research approach is used. In fact, the development of participants of a MBA training will be examined by analysing reflection papers of the training and by using a qualitative questionnaire, which was sent two years after the start of the leadership training. For this analysis the existing research about transfer of training and leader identity development will provide the basis.

1.2. Aim

The aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding about leader identity and to show how it can be developed by participating in formal leadership trainings. Therefore, additional value is created by combining existing literature about the transfer of training with the previous research about leader identity development.

In the section above several problems were mentioned which arise by developing leaders. On the one side this master thesis should contribute to the transfer of training literature by emphasising the need of informal learning and reflection in order to foster long-term transfer and identity development. In general, one goal of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of transfer of training as this is often only seen related to tools and theories. On the other side, the leader identity development is the focus of this thesis. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to show what triggers the development of the identity and how exactly does this development look like. Moreover, the use of metaphors in the qualitative
questionnaire will provide very personal information about the situations of the leaders, which further leads to new insights concerning their degree of development.

1.3. Research question

The research question acts as a basis for the whole research project. It was defined based on the stated problem and provides a guideline for this thesis. The research question is formulated as follows:

*How do leadership trainings influence leader identity development?*

In order to answer this research question, new insights for the researchers as well as for the practitioners will be provided.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows: In the first chapter, the research gap is outlined and the research question is formulated. Moreover, there is the aim of this thesis stated and an overview about the structure is given.

The second chapter provides the conceptual background for the further research and shows some results and models of former research, too. The chapter is divided into three subtopics. The chapter 2.1 deals with the transfer of training and shows factors which affect the transfer of training. In chapter 2.2 leader identity is defined and factors are shown which influence the identity formation. Additionally, it provides research about the different levels of the leader identity. The third theoretical chapter deals with leader identity development trainings. This chapter provides a combination of the two previous chapters and shows what the literature already suggests for transferring training knowledge in order to further develop the leader identity.

After giving theoretical information, the third chapter deals with the methodology of this thesis. Thereby the research context, the data collection and the data analysis will be described in detail as this is important to understand the process of the empirical investigation of the thesis.
Next, the results of the empirical research will be outlined in the fourth chapter. Three subchapters differentiate again between transfer of training, leader identity development and the influence of training on the identity development.

Afterwards, the fifth chapter will provide an elaborated discussion about the findings, whereby the results concerning transfer of training and leader identity development will be analysed by connecting them to previous research. Moreover, implications for theory as well as practice are shown and the limitations of this master thesis are named.

Finally, in chapter 6, the conclusion will provide a short summary about the main message and findings of this master thesis.
2. Conceptual background

This chapter presents a conceptual background of the two theoretical constructs of transfer of training and leader identity development. Thereby, this chapter refers to literature that provides definitions and scientific findings about the factors influencing transfer of training and leader identity development.

2.1. Transfer of training

This subchapter offers a definition of transfer of training and then goes on with factors affecting the transfer of training.

2.1.1. Definition of transfer of training

According to Baldwin and Ford (1988: 64) „the conditions of transfer include both the (1) generalization of material learned in training to the job context and (2) maintenance of the learned material over a period of time on the job.” With that definition it is underlined that not only the transfer to the job plays an important role, but also the retention over a longer period of time. Thereby, it can be distinguished between direct and indirect transfer (Nikandrou, Brinia, & Bereri, 2009). Direct transfer occurs when the trainee is “able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired to his work” (Nikandrou et al., 2009: 258). Whereas the transfer of skills developed during the training by interacting with other trainees and by using different methods can be seen as indirect transfer.

In general, the goal of transfer of training is “the provision of skills, abilities and knowledge to employees to achieve organizational objectives” (Bhatti, Battour, Sundram, & Othman, 2013: 274). Because of these skills, organizations expect additional value by investing in training activities. Therefore, the transfer of training is a critical point, as without a transfer of training the trainee will not be able to use the learned content in his or her work environment.

2.1.2. Factors affecting transfer of training

Previous research shows that there are some factors which influence the training transfer. Literature provides many different models in order to explain the influencing factors on training transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Lim & Lane, 2006; Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2016; Park, Lim, & Chang, 2016). This thesis refers to the model of Baldwin and Ford (1988), as this model provides the basis for many other theoretical models of transfer of training (Bhatti et al., 2013; Jacot, Raemdonck, & Frenay, 2015; Valerij & Tomaz, 2013; Lim & Morris, 2006). The model is illustrated in Figure 1.
The model shows the complexity of transfer of training. The training input factors are trainee characteristics, training design and work environment. These factors have a direct influence on the learning and retention (training output). Whereas, the learning and retention influences the generalization and maintenance (conditions of transfer). Additionally, the trainee characteristics and the work environment also have a direct influence on the conditions of transfer. For example, if the work environment does not support the training and it does not give the trainee the chance to make use of the learned content, the transfer of training is negatively influenced. Baldwin and Ford’s (1988) model includes a broad perspective with various factors. However, more recent research shows some additional factors. Next, these additional factors as well as the basic factors of Baldwin and Ford (1988) are analysed and explained in more detail.

First of all, it will be started with the **trainee characteristics**. Thereby, one factor which can be seen as part of the personality or as well of the ability of the trainee, is the **self-efficacy**. This individual characteristic indicates whether a participant of a training believes that he or she can use the learned skills in order to achieve certain goals (Bhatti, Ali, Isa, & Battour, 2014). Research about self-efficacy shows that people with a higher self-efficacy formulate for themselves more challenging goals in comparison to people with lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). These individuals are usually more motivated to reach their goals (Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008). It is shown by different researchers that
there is an influence of the self-efficacy on the transfer motivation (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Massenberg et al., 2016; Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008).

In general, the transfer motivation is one factor which attracted the attention of many researchers (Bosset & Bourgeois, 2015; Grohmann, Beller, & Kauffeld; 2014; Massenberg et al., 2016; Pham, Segers, & Gijsselaers, 2010). Thereby, literature distinguishes between “motivation to learn” and “motivation to transfer” (Noe, 1986). These two constructs can be defined as follows: “Motivation to learn is the desire to obtain knowledge and skills through training. Motivation to transfer can be understood as the desire to apply acquired knowledge and skills to the performance of job tasks.” (Lee, Lee, & Park, 2014: 2839). It has been proven that the motivation to learn is mainly influenced by individual criteria such as self-efficacy and organizational commitment, whereas the motivation to transfer is affected by the support of other organizational members. Interestingly, in the model of Baldwin and Ford (1988) there is no influence of the factor motivation indicated. However, this point was disproved by other researchers as they found that the motivation within a transfer process is an essential factor and can be influenced by other variables as for example by the transfer design or the perceived content validity (Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Jacot et al., 2015; Grohmann et al., 2014).

The second input factor named by Baldwin and Ford (1988) is the training design. It is defined as “the degree to which (1) training has been designed and delivered to give trainees the ability to transfer learning to the job, and (2) training instructions match job requirements” (Holton, Bates, & Ruona, 2000: 345). According to Lim and Morris (2006) it is essential to identify the transfer needs of the learner in order to design adequate training activities. Thereby, the emphasis is on the offering of post-training activities like action planning or mentoring, as this should help the trainee to internalize the learned content (Lim & Morris, 2006: 90). The research of Massenberg et al. (2016) as well as the findings of Grohmann et al. (2014) suggest that the training design influences the transfer motivation. Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons and Kavanagh (2007) tested the direct link between training design and transfer of training in their research project, and they found a statistically significant influence of training design on the transfer of training. This broad range of different research projects concerning the training design implies that there is no common consensus about the sort of influence of the design of the training on the transfer of training. However, there is a common understanding that there exists an influence which should remain in consideration when designing a training.
One factor which belongs to the training design is the content of the training. The influence of this factor is mainly determined by the perceived content validity. The perceived content validity is defined as “the extent to which trainees’ judge training content to reflect job requirements accurately” (Holton et al., 2000: 345). In connection with the perceived content validity, the theory of identical elements is often mentioned. This theory states that within the training a situation should be created which reminds the trainee on his or her work situation. This linkage should ease the transfer of the learned content into the working life and therefore has a positive impact on the transfer of training for the trainee (van der Locht, van der Dam, & Chiaburu, 2013).

The third training input category is the work environment. As the organisational performance is influenced by the individual performance, it is important to provide good support for improving the individual performance for example with feedback or peer support (Holton et al., 2000). Baldwin and Ford (1988) named four sources of support: senior management, supervisor, peers and subordinates. In this master thesis the support of the supervisor and the peer support are analysed in more detail. As already mentioned above, the motivation to transfer is influenced mainly by the support of organizational members. One task for supervisors in order to motivate their employees, is to show them opportunities to use the learned content (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Researchers even suggested to train the supervisors in this topic, as they have a strong impact on the transfer of training of their employees (Chauhan, Ghosh, Rai, & Shukla, 2016). One factor, which is especially relevant when exploring the organizational support, is the timing of this support. The transfer of training process can be divided in pre-training, during training and post-training phases. The supervisory support should already start in the pre-training phase by showing the trainee the potential areas where he or she can use the learned contents after the training (Massenberg et al., 2016). In the post-training phases, transfer of training can be facilitated, if the supervisor organizes regular meetings whereby he or she discusses with the trainee the progress of the training transfer (Bhatti et al., 2013).

### 2.2. Leader identity development

This subchapter provides a definition of leader identity and describes different levels and phases of leader identity development.

#### 2.2.1. Leader identity

According to Brown (2015: 20), identities are “people’s subjectively construed understandings of who they were, are and desire to become”. This definition shows that
identity is not only a question about who we are at the moment, but also about who we have been in the past and who we want to become in the future. The future identity can be called “possible self”, and can be divided into “desired self” and “feared self”. While an individual usually strives to reach a desired self (e.g. becoming a leader), the feared self (e.g. becoming a drug dealer) is avoided (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

People develop multiple identities and sub-identities over their lifetime (Day & Harrison, 2007; Lord & Hall, 2005). Thereby, it can be divided into social and personal identities. Social identities are based on collectives (e.g. organizations) and categories (e.g. gender), while personal identities are based on typical attributes of an individual (e.g. sense of humor) (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016: 115). Both forms of identity act simultaneously but there can arise tensions between it, as individuals “want to be part of a collective and be unique” (Asforth & Schinoff, 2016: 115).

After defining identity in general, now the focus shifts towards leader identity. A strong leader identity should be capable of influencing the behavior of the followers (Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, & Chang, 2012a). Moreover, leader identity is seen as a multilevel construct. It is differentiated between individual, relational and collective identity (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011; Day & Harrison, 2007; Lord & Hall, 2005). In the leader identity literature, this is the most used differentiation and researchers identified weak or strong identity by using these levels as well. As a result, identity on the individual level is mainly seen as a weak identity, whereas a strong identity is defined as an identity on the collective level (Lord & Hall, 2005; Day & Harrison, 2007; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, de Cremer, & Hogg, 2005; Zheng & Muir, 2015).

**Individual leader identity** refers to the differentiation of one person from the others (Lord & Hall, 2005). This level is especially relevant for and focused by young leaders, as they want to show that they are different to the other leaders and gain respect through showing their uniqueness. There are two relevant processes during this level: claiming and granting (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The individual hereby claims a leader identity by comparing his or her self-view of leadership to his or her own personal identity, and the social environment may grant the individual a leader identity. Through this claiming and granting process an individual can develop a personal identity as leader and include this in one’s “self-concept”. This is also called “individual internalization” (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Thereby, the goal is not only to establish a self-view as a leader, but also to be accepted as a leader by others. The leaders whose identities are on the individual level tend to focus their activities mainly on themselves (Lord & Hall, 2005).
The second level is the **relational leader identity**. According to Lord & Hall (2005: 596) relational identities “define the self in terms of specific roles or relations, often including others in the definition of one’s own self-identity”. This definition implies indirectly the differentiation to the first level, as it states that relations to others play a role on this level, which was on the first level neglected. Concerning the role of a leader, it was found that the relational identity is influenced by the role-based and by the personal-based identities of the leader and his or her subordinates (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Hence, it is emphasized that the relationship between leaders and followers is of importance on this level. According to Chang and Johnson (2010), the relational leader identity interrelates with the follower rated leader-member exchange. Moreover, it has been recognized that people with strong relational identity are striving to meet the expectations of their partners and to reach high-quality relationships by improving the situations of their partners (Jackson & Johnson, 2012).

The **collective leader identity** refers to a definition of oneself in relation to collectives or groups (Lord & Hall, 2005). In comparison to the relational identity, the collective leader identity is seen as an identity created by interactions with not only one other individual, but with whole groups or organizational collectives. If a leader has a strong collective identity, he or she feels strongly associated with the organization and represents the organizational culture and values (Johnson et al., 2012a). This can be also seen as group-focused behavior which characterizes a transformational leadership style (Johnson et al., 2012a). Thereby, the “we” is in the foreground of the interactions, and the leader acts on behalf of the organization (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). This can have an influence on the leader-member exchange, although the influence of the relational identity is hereby dominant (Jackson & Johnson, 2012).

### 2.2.2. Leader identity development

The development of a leader identity is a complex process which includes a “profound transformation in what people think, feel and value” (Ibarra, Snook, Ramo, 2010: 7f). The goal of this process is to reach an improved matching of the leader's role and his or her identity (Hall, 2004).

There are some factors which influence the leader identity development. Figure 2 shows a model from Zheng & Muir (2015: 643) which highlights the relevance of confidence and defines three processes: “expanding boundaries”, “recognizing interdependencies” and “discerning purpose”. Expanding boundaries is about broadening the own responsibility area. By developing a stronger leader identity, the leader will feel more responsible for his or her organization and will rather take the initiative for change. The second factor,
recognizing interdependencies, is shifting the focus of the leader from himself or herself to other people. This means that the leader not only follows own ideas and values, but also cooperates with the followers and listens to their ideas (Zheng & Muir, 2015; Lord & Hall, 2005; Day & Harrison, 2007). This is also supported by the research of DeRue & Ashford (2010) who described the leader identity as social construct, which develops through the interactions between leaders and followers. The third factor “discerning purpose” is about realizing that the leader activities can benefit others and focuses on the well-being of the followers (Zheng & Muir, 2015; Hammond et al., 2017). These three factors are in connection with the understanding of leadership, which changes by further development of the identity. Moreover, the development of the leader identity development results in a growing confidence (Zheng & Muir, 2015; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, Osteen, 2005). This point is also underlined by the research of Hammond et al. (2017), as they showed that a “higher” development as leader leads to a more strengthened view of the leader about himself or herself and further to a higher confidence level.

![Figure 2: A Multi-Faceted Model of Leader Identity Development (Zheng & Muir, 2015: 643)](image)

Besides the named factors in Figure 2 some other interrelations were found. For example, it was shown that the desired selves (see chapter 2.2.1) play an important role in leader identity development as they influence the motivation for developmental activities (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Additionally, previous research stated that peers and groups also influence the leader identity development (Komives et al., 2005).
For defining the level of development, Hammond et al. (2017) mentioned four main dimensions: “strength of identity, integration within one’s broader self-concept, the level of identity orientation and the meaning of being a leader” and rated them on a scale from low to high (Hammond et al., 2017: 482f). This master thesis specialized the analysis on two of these four dimensions: “level of inclusiveness” and “meaning”. The investigation of the other two dimensions would have needed another research design, and the two selected dimensions are seen as highly influential for answering the research question. The model of Hammond et al. is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Components of Leader Identity at Various Levels of Development (adapted: Hammond et al., 2017: 483)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Development</th>
<th>Level of Inclusiveness</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(I am a leader for the good of a group in which I belong.)</td>
<td>(Leadership is about group members collaborating.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Interpersonal influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(I am a leader because of the close relationships I have with important others.)</td>
<td>(Leadership means influencing others to achieve goals.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(I am a leader because I possess leadership abilities, talents, and skills.)</td>
<td>(Leadership means taking charge of a situation.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Italicized words describe each component of leader identity at the particular level of development. Words in parentheses provide an example for each component of leader identity at the particular level of development.

Concerning the level of identity orientation or level of inclusiveness, Hammond et al. (2017) also differentiate between identity on the individual, relational and collective level, whereby the individual level stands for the lowest level of development and the collective level for the highest. The model provides exact definitions of each level which were used for the data analysis of this research project.

The second analyzed component, the meaning of being a leader, shows how a leader defines leadership. The way a leader sees and defines leadership has an impact on his or her leadership style and furthermore influences the leader identity (Day & Harrison, 2007; Miscenko, Guenter, & Day, 2017; Lord & Hall, 2005; Hammond et al., 2017). According to this model, adopting a shared leadership style is an indicator for a highly developed
identity, and a dominant approach to leadership stands for a lower level of development (Hammond et al., 2017). This factor is especially relevant during identity changes, as these go in line with changes in the meaning of identities. Thereby, discrepancies between the former identity standard and the new perceptions arise, which can lead to a change in identity (Burke, 2006). In order to deal with these discrepancies, organizational actors may apply sensemaking (Hammond et al., 2017).

2.3. Leader identity development training

After identifying the different levels of leader identity and naming the influences on it, this chapter deals with the question how leadership trainings should be structured in order to stimulate leader identity development. Moreover, it shows why the development of leader identity through leadership trainings is essential.

As outlined in the chapters above, the construct of leader identity is a very complex one. Especially unexperienced leaders can have problems with understanding their role in the company and incongruities can arise (Carden & Callahan, 2007). In order to avoid this, leader identity development trainings should deal with issues like that. It is suggested that the role of the leader should be discussed during training and development programs, and moreover, it should be analyzed if incongruities exist and how they can be eliminated (Carden & Callahan, 2007). Hence, a leadership development training can be seen as a facilitator for identity transition. Thus, thought-provoking impulses should help leaders to question their identity and to develop their self-concept further (Ibarra et al., 2010).

There is evidence that, if identity work is concretely included in the leadership trainings, this can be valuable for the further development of the leaders (Warhurst, 2012; Nicholson & Caroll, 2013; Priest & Middleton, 2016; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012; Komives et al., 2005). One point, which was examined by researchers is the “identity undoing”. By confronting the trainees with the exploration of their identity, a change in identity should be triggered (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013). By doing this identity work, the current identity level of the trainees should be considered (Johnson et al., 2012a).

Another point mentioned by some researchers is the encouragement of self-reflection during these trainings but also later on. Discussions with others as well as writing a learning journey can lead to leader identity change and development (Miscenko et al., 2017; Brown, McCracken, & O’Kane, 2011). Thereby, not only the experiences at work but also at other domains should be part of the reflection, as this can lead to a broader
conceptualization of leadership and can help to develop the own self-concept (Hammond et al., 2017).

In general leadership development programs should not only focus on technical or behavioral skills, but through identity development, they should also motivate the trainees to use the learned tools, as the transfer of the training is necessary to foster identity change and development (Johnson et al., 2012a).

2.4. Theoretical problem statement

The research field of transfer of training has already been investigated for a long time. However, the focus of the research was on quantitative studies, for which questionnaires and ratings were used (Brown & Warren, 2014; Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Johnson, Garrison, Hernez-Broome, Fleenor, Steed, 2012b). Moreover, an emphasis was placed on factors influencing the transfer of training and different models about these factors were established (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Lim & Lane, 2006; Massenberg et al., 2016; Park et al., 2016). In general, there was a focus on skill-building trainings which often were short-term oriented (Komives et al., 2005). There is a lack of qualitative research which on the one side should test the existing models and on the other hand also provide new insights about the transfer of training.

The second research area, relevant for this thesis, is the field of leader identity development. Although there is a long history of research on identities, the connection to leadership and leaders is quite new. As Johnson et al. (2012a: 1270) stated “[t]he interplay between leadership and identity is likely broader than what is currently believed, and it is our hope that this study helps spark further research on these topics.” This statement shows that there is more research in this field necessary in order to understand all the interconnections. Moreover, after providing an understanding about the identity processes, some researchers stated that it would be useful to better examine the conditions and contexts which trigger development (Ibarra et al., 2010; Zheng & Muir, 2015; Brown, 2015).

An additional point which was examined in the transfer of training research as well as in the leader identity development research is the influence of reflection (Sparr, Knipfer, & Willems, 2017; Miscenko et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2011). It was stated that reflection influences the transfer of training and the leader identity development. For a more detailed
examination of this point, this master thesis explores whether the reflections of trainings trigger leader identity development and if they do how the influence looks like.

During the literature review it was noticeable that there is a lack of research which connects the knowledge of these two fields for a better understanding of the influence of leadership trainings on the identity development. The reason for that might be that the transfer of training research is mainly short-term focused, whereas the leader identity development research is long-term oriented. However, as leadership development programs often include formal training, the influence of these trainings on the identity development should not be left out of consideration. In order to eliminate this research gap, this master thesis connects the two fields of research in order to get new insights for developing leader identities.
3. Methodology

In this master thesis qualitative research methods are the core foundations. The key elements of qualitative research include “aims which are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Snape & Spencer, 2003: 3).

This method was used, as it is expected to get more in-depth results in order to answer the research question, than it might be possible to get with the use of quantitative research.

3.1. Research context

The analysed data material was collected from participants of a leadership training. Hence, the setting and context of the training will be explained in order to outline the research context.

The analysed training program was called “Leadership Experience” and is part of an MBA training at the LIMAK Business School in Linz. It started in October 2015 and was divided in three sessions which each lasted three days. Each session dealt with a different major topic. The first training session was about managing challenging situations as a leader, the second was about understanding and leading teams efficiently and the third session was about designing and steering change processes. The whole program was done by two groups simultaneously, whereby each group had around 15 participants per training. Four different trainers held this training program. One of them did each of the three sessions, and the others did only one session. In order to complete the training, the participants had to hand in reflection papers, whereby they had to summarize the learnings and reflect about them, by applying the learned tools and theories on a real situation at their company.

The participants of the training were from different companies and all of them had different backgrounds. However, the common goal of this “Leadership Experience” program was to initiate reflection about their own leadership style and to further develop the managerial competences (LIMAK, 2018).
3.2. Data collection

In general, the data collection can be divided into two phases. The first phase started in October 2015 at the same time as the training program started. As described above, the participants had to hand in reflection papers after each session. Thereby, the participants were asked to answer additional questions for the research project. In these additional questions they were invited to further elaborate about new or changed perspectives they experienced during the training and changes they want to implement after the training, caused by their learnings and reflections.

The second phase started in July 2017. In this phase, a first analysis of the main topics of the reflection papers served as a basis for the creation of a qualitative questionnaire, which was sent to the participants in October 2017. Several feedback loops were integrated in order to improve the quality of the questionnaire. The answers of this survey should provide additional data for the analysis of the research question. As it was sent two years after the start of the training program it should show how the participants dealt with their planned changes and also display whether their leader identity has developed.

The questionnaire asked for the participants’ definitions of what “being a good leader” means to them. Next, the participants were animated to think about their leadership style in October 2015 and describe it by using a metaphor. Then, they were asked how they managed the implementation of the planned changes in their work environment. Moreover, the focus was on which factors were beneficial or hindering for putting the plans into practice. Next, the leaders should describe their present leadership style by using again a metaphor. The last question referred to how they perceived the influence of the leadership training on their personal development.

As the approach of using metaphors in qualitative questionnaires is quite new, the reasons for that are outlined in more detail. A metaphor is defined as “an expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). Previous research about metaphors pointed out that metaphors are a way to structure thoughts and to understand experiences better (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The use of metaphors should provide new perspectives on the described situations (Carpenter, 2008). Therefore, this approach seems appropriate for exploring the situations of the leaders in the past as well as in the present. It was expected that the respondents might give more information about their situations, if they had to describe it indirectly with a metaphor instead of directly using a description.
The questionnaire was sent to the participants who answered all the additional questions in their reflection papers. Therefore, the questionnaire was sent to 21 leaders, and 14 of them answered it. As one of the 14 had no real leadership responsibility at his workplace, his data material was eliminated from the analysis, as the goal of the research is to find out how leader identities can develop, and therefore it is necessary to have at least some leadership responsibilities.

Ultimately, there were 13 different cases defined. Each of these cases included three reflection papers (one per training) and the answers to the questionnaire. This means that in total the data collection consists of 39 reflection papers and 13 questionnaires.

3.3. Data analysis

In general, the data analysis can be divided into three phases. The first phase of data analysis already started in July 2017. There, the first reading of the reflection papers took place in order to get an overview about the main topics. The goal of this step was to get an overall understanding of the available data material in order to start with the design of the questionnaire. This point is a very critical one as McQuirk and O’Neill (2016: 247) described: “The design stage is where a great deal of researcher skill is vested, and it is a critical stage in ensuring the worth of the data collected.” If the design of a questionnaire is not well-considered, it might happen that the collected data material does not lead to any new insights into the researched topic. Therefore, some feedback loops were integrated in order to assure the quality of the questionnaire, which is a prerequisite for a good data analysis in the later stage of the research.

The second phase of the data analysis started in November 2017 by first reading the answers of the leaders on the qualitative questionnaire. Thereby, the first step was again to read the data material for getting an overview. Moreover, in this phase an extensive literature review was carried out in order to gather additional knowledge for the main part of the data analysis in December 2017.

Then, in December 2017 the third and most extensive phase of data analysis started. For this phase, interpretative social research was used as with interpretative social research sense structures can be interpreted and information about the social reality gathered (Kleeman, Krähnke and Matuschek, 2013). As the data analysis has to be conducted on a broad range of data it was decided to use the theme analysis by Froschauer and Lueger (2003), which is especially useful for such incidents. The main goal of the theme analysis
is to provide an overview about the contents and relations between the texts. The theme analysis can be conducted with two different methods. The first method is called “text reduction method” which provides mainly a summary of the texts. The second method, which is used in this thesis, is called “coding method”. Therefore, single text fragments will be coded and categorized. The established categories will then be structured according to their relevance to the research question. The remaining system will provide the basis for the interpretation (Froschauer and Lueger, 2003: 111).

By coding the data, the reflection papers including the additional questions served as a basis for analysing the leader’s identity at the time of the training. On the contrary the answers of the questionnaire were used for developing an understanding about the current situation of the leaders and about how the leaders perceived the planned changes.

For coding the material, a software for qualitative data analysis (QDA Miner Lite) was used. With this software the process was eased, as it was possible to match text fragments with codes and later on generate different reports with the coded text fragments. Moreover, it helped to keep track of the amount of codes and coded sentences. The coding was done in an inductive as well as deductive way. Inductive formation of categories derives the categories directly from the data material, without linking them to former established theoretical constructs (Mayring, 2010). This was done by coding the data for the transfer of training results and the plans the leaders established for the time after the training. On the contrary, deductive formation of categories is guided by theory. Thereby, the categories are based on existing literature (Mayring, 2010). This was the case, by coding the metaphors and reflection papers for findings of the level of identity and the meaning of leadership. The codes were based on the theory of Hammond et al. (2017) and used for the coding system. Similar codes then were classified in several main categories. Figure 3 gives an overview on how the category system of the transfer of training finally looked like.
After coding each relevant text fragment, a table was established which shows all categories of codes per case. Based on this table, the author was able to see connections between different segments. By adding the level of identity and meaning to the table, it was also possible to see if one of the parts of the training transfer had an influence on the development of the identity. The table (see table 5) can be found in the next chapter, where the results will be described.

For coding the metaphors, it turned out that it is very complex to directly match one of the codes, therefore it was decided to do a step in between. Thereby, the metaphors were translated into adjectives and nouns which then could be interpreted more easily. Moreover, a scale was established, which rated the metaphors in turns of how certain the leader felt. More details to that will be provided in the results section, as this will be described by giving an actual example.

The coding method by Froschauer and Lueger (2003) proved to be very helpful for this kind of data analysis. Especially, as there was a lot of text available from the reflection papers, the use of this method provided an excellent overview about the relevant factors and developments.
4. Empirical results

The fourth chapter provides a description of the results of the analysis. First of all, it starts with the factors concerning the transfer of training, then it continues with describing the results of the leader identity development. The final subchapter will combine the results of both research fields and will identify some interdependencies.

4.1. Transfer of training

In this chapter the available data was analysed in order to find out about how the transfer of training of this MBA program worked and which factors turned out to be the most influential. This step is necessary for being able to answer the research question, which asks about the influence of leadership trainings on leader identity development.

First of all, the training design is analysed. Therefore, not only the reflection papers and the questionnaires were analysed, but also the content and structure of the whole training. As the structure was already described in the research context (see chapter 3.1) it is only be summarized shortly in this section to provide the basis for the discussion in the next chapter. The training was structured in three sessions, each took place three days and each was dealing with one specific topic. During the trainings the leaders had to interactively participate as the training content also included outdoor exercises and discussions. As post-training activity the trainees were asked to write the reflection papers, whereby they had to apply the learned theoretical concepts and methods on a situation within their job. Moreover, they were asked to describe concrete changes they want to implement after the training in their work life.

As a next step, for a deeper analysis of the training content the available data was analysed in order to identify concrete triggers of learning within the trainings. This analysis searched for elements of the training design, which were described as useful and lead to some form of learning. Thereby, it was differentiated between exercises, theory, case studies and discussions during the training. As the analysis of the papers showed, these factors were triggering thought-provoking impulses, which can be seen as a start of a learning process. In fact, the triggered actions were differentiated between reflection and self-analysis. Table 2 gives an overview about the triggers, the triggered actions and about the topics, in which the leaders wanted to implement changes after the training. Each of these named factors is defined and explained in more detail below.
Table 2: Triggers and Triggered Actions (own illustration)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Triggers</th>
<th>Triggered event</th>
<th>Planned changes concerning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Theory Exercises Discussions</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theory Exercises Discussions</td>
<td>Reflection Self-Analysis</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Self-Analysis</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Theory Exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Leadership Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Theory Exercises Case studies</td>
<td>Reflection Self-Analysis</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Definition of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Theory Exercises</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Theory Discussions</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Theory Exercises</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Definition of Leadership Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Theory Exercises Discussions Case studies</td>
<td>Reflection Self-Analysis</td>
<td>Leadership of Employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factor “theory” was named by each participant. Thereby, they described that theoretical inputs helped them to reanalyse a situation in their company and to understand it better. One often named theoretical concept was the Eisenhower Matrix. Many leaders described how they want to use this tool in the future for managing their tasks. Concerning this factor, participants also wrote in their reflection papers that they became aware that reading more scientific articles and leadership literature would help them for their future work.
The secondary named factor are the “exercises”. During the leadership trainings various exercises were conducted. These were exercises like business simulation or leading blind colleagues through a course. One participant described a situation during an exercise as follows:

“A new experience, by the way, was also to be an assembly-line worker during an exercise (building paper aeroplanes). As I am in an executive department in the real daily business, it was new to me and illustrative to be for once in a situation of total comparability (e.g. output, measured in paper aeroplane per time unit).” (Case_10.3)

Similar to this quote, other leaders mentioned different situations in the exercises where they had to play the role of the follower, which gave them new insights and perspectives on different leadership styles. Additionally, there were experiences as leaders within the exercises mentioned, where they had to deal with different challenges and realized through the direct feedback and reflection afterwards, how difficult it can be to make the right decisions, especially under time pressure.

Case studies were used in the training to discuss and analyse special situations. This method was also seen by a few participants as a trigger for further learnings or reflections. Especially the fact that with these case studies different models could be illustrated in more detail was seen as important. Moreover, one leader, e.g., mentioned that with the use of one case study he became aware of the breadth of challenges during an organizational change (Case_6.3).

Besides the more training content oriented factors like the theoretical parts and the exercises, it was mentioned that the discussions with the other leaders in the training provided additional value for many. These discussions were on the one hand during the official part of the training, e.g. in reflection rounds, and on the other hand unofficial discussions during the coffee breaks. Thereby, it was especially emphasized that awareness was raised that other leaders have similar problems and it was interesting to see how they deal with these situations.

“The experience exchange with my colleagues was really important, as you can retrieve many similar situations.” (Case_9.3)

After shortly describing all of the triggers of learning, now the triggered events will be explained in more detail. As mentioned and shown above (see Table 2) almost all leaders described some kind of reflection or self-analysis as triggered event. Only in two cases there could not be found a clear evidence for either of them. In general, the differentiation
between reflection and self-analysis was done as follows: the statements were coded as reflection, when the leaders mentioned that the participation in the training, or in special parts of the training, challenged the existing perspectives of the trainees and that they were inspired to re-evaluate different situations or meanings. A leader described this as follows:

“The new perspectives and knowledge invite to reflect on experienced leadership situations in daily life (regardless of it is from the perspective of a follower or leader) and thereby use the learned theories of the training.” (Case 10.1)

In comparison to that, the coding self-analysis was used to see if the trainees described a concrete insight which they got about themselves. One example of self-analysis is shown in this statement:

“I got aware, only now, how authoritarian my leadership style can be in some situations. In the described situation my frustration, that the employee could not come to the same conclusions and goals as me “by himself”, was followed by a quite sudden change to strongly authoritarian leadership behaviour, as I wanted to enforce goals without any discussions (which is normally not working).” (Case_2.1)

The self-analysis was mainly triggered by the exercises, as the trainees had to play the role of the leader in different simulation games and then realized during the reflection round that their behaviour in their workplace was not that different from their behaviour in the games. Moreover, it was mentioned that the discussions with the other participants showed them how their actions were seen by the others and this information brought them new insights, as in work life employees often do not tell their leader how they perceive his or her behaviour.

It was conspicuous that some kind of concrete reflection or self-analysis were mentioned in the majority of reflection papers. Therefore, in the analysis these two processes were seen as an intermediate step between the triggers of learning and the formulation of the concrete plans for change.

One more point which was mentioned by a leader describing the design of the training is shown in this citation:

“If the content of the training fitted very well to the own situation in the company, the implementation of the plans was easier. However, for the long-term efficacy general valid content is more appropriate.” (Case_4.4)
This statement was given in the questionnaire in 2017, therefore the experience of the transfer of the leadership training is already included. It underlines the fact that theory was mentioned as one of the main triggers. Eventually, theory can be seen as “general valid content”, which here was described as important for a long-term effect of learning. Moreover, the statements also show the efficacy of the exercises and case studies, as with that the implementation of the plan were supported.

After describing the elements and results of the training design, now the planned changes of the trainees will be described. This analysis should give some information for a later interpretation of the characteristics of the trainee, as the set goals can be seen as indicators for the degree of self-efficacy and motivation. In the reflection papers, the participants of the training were asked to write about concrete changes they want to implement after the training in their work life. The answers can be differentiated in three categories. One category deals with changes concerning the leadership of employees, the second category deals with the rethinking of the definition of leadership and the third category is about changes in communicational issues (see Table 2).

The first category includes improvements like a better sense making for the employees, more feedback for the employees, more employee evaluations or a higher degree of delegation. The last point goes in hand with trusting the employees more and giving them additional responsibilities. Especially the point with sense making was highlighted as important. One leader formulated this point as follows:

“Another new insight is, that an order for a team which was formulated out of an own goal or vision, does not mean that the team has the same goal as team goal, but that it is a sensible process to develop a team goal out of an order.” (Case_8.2)

The second category describes how the leaders are planning to redefine leadership for them personally. It was mentioned that leadership was defined differently before the training and that some of the trainees want to spend more time on thinking about the question “what is leadership” and “what are my main duties as leader”. Thereby, it was noticeable that a theoretical concept about leadership skills brought lots of insights to this. The concept differentiates between technical, social and conceptual leadership skills. This brought some of the leaders to the point that they reflected about their own skills and most of them saw their strength in the technical skills and their weakness in the conceptual ones. They also mentioned, that because of their own technical strength, the conceptual part of their leadership role got neglected. However, after the session, in which they learned this model, many of them said that they want to redefine leadership for them...
personally, in order to make space also for the conceptual tasks. Another point was the topic about the complexity of leadership. The reflection papers showed that often the role of being a leader was underestimated and not seen as complex as it is, which again gave inspiration for rethinking the view of leadership. Lastly, leadership was sometimes seen as a kind of attachment to the normal work. Optimally, for leaders the leadership topic should be a very central one and not only an add-on to their job. This insight was described and named as a reason for redefining leadership.

The category about communicational issues deals with plans to improve the communication with the followers, but also with the supervisors. One of the main triggers for that was the transactional communication model, which was explained in one of the training sessions, which inspired some of the leaders to change their way of communication.

The next analysed factor is the **work environment**. It was shown that the most named topics in connection with that were the degree of organizational support and the structure and culture of the company. Only in three of the cases it has been mentioned that the support at the workplace for using the learned content and implementing some changes was high. Furthermore, in four other cases it was mentioned that there was only low support and the present company structure and culture were hindering the transfer of the knowledge of the training to the daily work. How these factors concretely influenced the leader identity development will be discussed below in chapter 4.3.

Moreover, in the questionnaires, it was asked about factors which influenced the transfer of training positively or negatively. The answers to these questions should give further insights to the **daily work life** in the companies and depict why transfer of training sometimes is working well or not. First of all, the positive factors according to the trainees were time for self-reflection, support of the leader, having a defined plan, knowledge about new methods and theories, sense giving and the literature. Especially, the factor self-reflection was named frequently by the leaders. On the other side, the factors which had a negative influence on the transfer of training were lack of time, lack of responsibility, high pressure through a high workload, different opinions in the team and changes of basic conditions (e.g. new manager or change of company). Thereby, it stands out that on the one hand time for reflection seemed to be the most valuable factor, but on the other hand a lack of time was the factor which was named the most as a negative influence on the transfer.
Another element which was asked in the questionnaires, was how the participants perceived the influence of the leadership training on their personal development. This was described as positive by nine of the asked people, four of them even perceived it as very positive and inspiring and only one just found it okay.

4.2. Leader identity development

In order to discover the level of identity of the participants of the trainings, the reflection papers and the two metaphors of the questionnaire were analysed. First of all, each metaphor was matched with adjectives and nouns. During this step the metaphors were interpreted translated in more concrete formulations. Hereby, it has to be said that not every respondent of the survey used a metaphor. Some of the respondent just provided a description of their situation. However, it has been attempted to interpret these descriptions in the same way as the metaphors were interpreted. In order to get a better understanding how this first interpretation was done, one example is provided. The following metaphor was written by a leader as description for his situation in October 2015:

“Like a hen in a hen-coop.” (Case_7.4)

This metaphor was matched during the first interpretation phase with the words “disorder, no overview” as this is associated with being a hen in a hen-coop. All of these descriptions are shown in the Table 3 below.
The first column shows the interpretation of the metaphors of the situation in 2015 and the second column shows the metaphors, describing the situation in 2017. This table displays that there were some changes and developments between the metaphor, describing the situation in autumn 2015 and the metaphor, describing the situation in autumn 2017. Whereas in the first column the words pressure, overstrained and disorder can be found quite often, in the second column words like overview and structure can be found. In fact, more than a half of the first metaphors described overstrained, uncertain leaders who were acting under pressure. In comparison to that, the interpretation of the second metaphor draw a picture of way more balanced leader, who feel more certain by executing leadership responsibilities.

Certainty seemed to be an essential factor for interpreting all of the metaphors. Therefore, a further classification of the metaphors was done. Thereby, it was distinguished between four categories: leaders who felt very uncertain, uncertain, certain or very certain. The example with the hen in the hen-coop was categorized as feeling uncertain. The results of this categorization are shown in Table 4. The colours should help to illustrate the development from red (uncertain) to green (certain).
In nine of the cases a clear improvement can be found by interpreting the metaphors. Only two of the leaders are still feeling uncertain two years after the training, however even one of them showed at least some improvement. In general, the categorization with the degree of certainty should help to better understand the interpretations of the metaphors and also provide a clearer picture about the situations of the leaders in autumn 2015.

As a third step of analysis it was attempted to assign a level of identity to each metaphor. The same was done with the three categories of meaning of leadership. Thereby, the definition of levels and meanings from Hammond et al. (2017) was used as basis for the categorization. However, it has to be stated that this process was not possible with each metaphor as some of them could not be coded with a level or meaning of leadership. Besides the interpretation of the metaphors, the same procedure was done with the reflection papers in order to obtain also an external evaluation of the situation and not only rely on the self-perception described by the leaders in the metaphors. Additionally, in the questionnaire the participants of the training were asked to give their own definition of “being a good leader”. The levels and meanings were assigned to these definitions as well, in order to create a desired value for each case. The results of that interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Metaphor 1</th>
<th>Metaphor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>certain</td>
<td>certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>very uncertain</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td>certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>very uncertain</td>
<td>very certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>very uncertain</td>
<td>certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>certain</td>
<td>certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td>very certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td>very certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
<td>uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>certain</td>
<td>very certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>certain</td>
<td>certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>certain</td>
<td>very certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>very uncertain</td>
<td>certain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
step are shown in Table 5. A more detailed explanation on how this step of analysis was done, is provided in the next paragraphs.

For a better illustration of the interpretation procedure one example will be named. In one case the leader described himself in autumn 2015 using following metaphor:

“An animal tamer, who had to drill and stage ten different animal breeds and the show does not allow any mistake!” (Case_8.4)

The interpretation of this metaphor showed that the leader was at this time on the individual level, as he seemed to be very concentrated on himself and on his abilities in order to master the situation. The meaning of leadership was coded with “dominance”, as an animal tamer usually has to act very dominantly. Moreover, the used definition of the meaning of leadership on the level “dominance” of Hammond et al. (2017: 483) states that “leadership means taking charge of a situation”, which is definitely the case as animal tamer.

An interesting contrast shows the metaphor which describes the same leader two years later, in 2017:

“As [Noah] on Noah’s Ark, who could unite all the animals and manage that all follow the same goal”. (Case_8.4)

In comparison to the first metaphor, this one is seen as being on the collective level and the meaning was interpreted as having an interpersonal influence on the employees. This interpretation is motivated by the fact that now it sounds like as he is feeling as part of a whole group and that he is able to influence the employees in order to reach goals, which draws a completely different picture than the first metaphor.

For the analysis of the reflection papers, the procedure was similar. All three of them for each case were read and then interpreted. The reflection papers mainly included situations of the leaders, which they described and brought into connection with the learned content of the training. The behaviour of the leaders in these situations was tried to be interpreted, in order to assign a level and meaning to it. The procedure with the definitions of “being a good leader” given in the questionnaires, was very similar to the metaphor analysis.
Table 5: Levels and Meaning of Leadership (own illustration)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Metaphor 1</th>
<th>Reflection paper</th>
<th>Metaphor 2</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
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As it can be seen in Table 5, within the reflection papers and the first metaphor the predominant level of leader identity was the individual one. Concerning the meaning of leadership, the dominance can be found most often by interpreting the data of autumn 2015. Interestingly, the second metaphor of the leaders was four times only assigned to the individual level, but in six cases to the relational or collective level. This reflects also in the meaning of the second metaphor where the category of interpersonal influence and shared leadership was prevailing. By attaching the perceived definition of “being a good leader” to this model, it can be said that the level was mainly identified as relational or collective and the meaning was described with the interpersonal influence. Although there can be seen a positive trend in the development when comparing the analysis of the situations in 2015 and the situations in 2017, it is only a slight change in comparison to the analysis of the degree of certainty.

4.3. Influence of training on identity development

Now, for showing concrete influences of the transfer factors on the identity development, this chapter will provide the results, which emphasise some interconnections of the two subchapters above.

In general, as the overall development can be described as very positive, it has to be said that the existence of reflection and self-analysis can be seen as a positive influence for that. Only in two cases there could not be found a description of some kind of reflection or self-analysis, and in one of these cases the leader stayed on the same level as he was before.

By analysing the influence of the plans, which were formulated after the training, on the identity development, it turned out that all leaders who showed a clear positive development in their level of identity and meaning of leadership, planned to rethink the definition of leadership after the training.

One more point which was conspicuous when combining the results of transfer of training with the identity development, is that the support of the supervisors or colleagues within the company turned out to have no considerable influence on the leader identity development. The same is valid for the company culture and structures within the company. The results show that e.g. one leader who experienced low support made the same progress as one leader who described high support. The two other leaders who described good support at the company at least made a slightly better progress.
Additionally, leaders who described that they had to deal with complicated structures and were kind of stuck in the culture of their company, still were able to develop their identity further.

Moreover, as described above the participants were questioned, how they perceived the influence of the training on their personal development. Interestingly, by combining the ratings with the development of the leader identity, it is shown that the one who rated the training as “okay, but not that positive”, was categorized by the metaphor analysis both times as “uncertain”. Also, when looking at the levels of identity and meanings of leadership, no progress can be identified. On the contrary, the leaders who found the training “very positive and inspiring” made a significant development. Two of them even felt “very certain” by writing their second metaphor.

Summarizing the results, it has to be pointed out that many triggers were identified, which set off actions. These triggered actions are seen as main influencers of the further development of the identity. Concerning the identity progress, the analysis with the level of perceived leader certainty gives interesting insights and clearly shows positive developments. Additionally, the classification by the level of identity and the meaning of leadership according to Hammond et al. (2017) provided more insights into the identity development. All in all, it can be remarked that the data analysis provides a solid foundation for further discussion.
5. Discussion of results

The analysis in chapter 4 shows already some interesting results of the qualitative research. Now these results will be interpreted and discussed in more detail and matched with the existing research models. For answering the research question “how do leadership trainings influence leader identity development” the first part of the discussions should interpret the changes of identity and as a consequence link them to possible triggers.

The pictures drawn by the metaphors are very exciting. In autumn 2015 a majority of the leaders described their situations as overstrained, uncertain and under pressure. It does not really sound as they were feeling comfortable in their position and there was depicted enough room for improvement. However, the metaphors for characterizing the situation in autumn 2017, were more positive oriented and were describing leaders who were structured, goal-oriented and had a better overview. In Table 4 the coding with the degree of certainty of the leaders shows a clear positive change. Certainty is an important factor of leadership, because when a leader feels uncertain and shows that to the employees, they will have problems to trust their leader. In the research of Zheng & Muir (2015) the degree of certainty is reflected as level of confidence. Their theoretical model shows that with a stronger leader identity the confidence level of the leaders rises. This interacts perfectly with the results of the present research as the increase of the degree of certainty and the level of confidence goes hand in hand with each other. Similar results were shown by the research of Warhurst (2012). There the leaders also reported that they felt more confident after the training and that they “had developed a self that was capable of coping with uncertainty” (Warhurst, 2012: 480).

The research of Lord & Hall (2005) supports the point that a high self-confidence is necessary for leader identity development. Further, they showed a clear connection between skill development and identity development. In their model the leader develops from a novice to an expert in his or her area by developing the identity further. This point has high relevance for the present research as one focus of the MBA training was the further skill development, and as there can be seen a positive development in the level of identity and also certainty, which indicate that the assumptions of Lord & Hall (2005) are supported.

As already mentioned besides the level of certainty there is also a positive development concerning the levels of identity and the meanings of leadership determined. However, the degree of certainty showed a clearer trend. Causes for this deviation can be the time
period of the research. Changes in the level of identity or in the meaning of leadership can take a long time and might not be that visible after two years. Although the leader feels more confident and certain in his or her position, it does not mean that he or she has already developed that far, that he or she climbs up the levels of Hammond et al. (2017). However, the developments shown in the data still give interesting information about the concept of leader identity. Whereas, almost all of the coded metaphors of autumn 2015 (with one exception) showed a leader on the individual level, in the coding of the second metaphors the relational and collective level were predominant.

Thereby, the fact that all leaders who had a clear positive development, planned after the training to rethink their definition of leadership is interesting. The research of Burke (2006) already showed that identity changes have to include a change in the meanings which is supported by the research of Hammond et al. (2017). Moreover, the model of Zheng and Muir (2015) shows the development of the understanding of leadership as a central factor. Previous research also found that leadership development trainings should motivate the participants in order to reconstruct their identity. The trainings should furthermore depict new sets of identity meanings (Miscenko et al., 2017). Thereby, it was also shown that a change in meaning often is triggered by an external influence, which could be a training. The results of the current research are in line with the discoveries of previous literature. However, the new findings strengthen the point of redefining leadership during trainings, as the positive influence of this point was clearly shown. Including different concepts of leadership in a training (like it was done in this training) helps the participants by redefining their perspective on leadership, and therefore ensure a transfer.

As described in the results section, not only the metaphors were analysed, but also the reflection papers. Concerning the level of identity, only one case showed a deviation between the external and internal evaluation. This is not surprising as the level of identity is about how the leader sees himself or herself in relation to others, the identity level is something which should be clearly visible by others as well. DeRue & Ashford (2010) described in their research a process of claiming and granting a leader identity. This process is done by the leaders as well as by the followers. In order to be a leader, it is necessary that the followers grant the person this leader identity. Therefore, the leader identity must be visible also for external evaluations.

In reverse, there were found some deviations by comparing the meaning of leadership of the reflection papers with the metaphor analysis. This can be explained with the fact that the meaning of leadership is a very personal attribute of the leader, and it can be problematic to determine it by only reading the reflection papers. Another reason can be
that the leaders were highly critical with themselves by writing the metaphors for 2015, which can also lead to a lower ranking in the framework in comparison to what the external assessment resulted.

Another interpretation on the basis of level and meaning was done with the definitions of “being a good leader” given by each leader in the survey. These definitions were seen as desired value. Thereby, it was remarkable that concerning the level of identity in four cases the level of the definition was lower than the level of the second metaphor. It would have been expected that the definition level should be higher or at least on the same level, if they see themselves as good leaders. Although this assumption was proved to be true in the majority of the cases, these four cases caught the attention of the author. This discrepancy could be a sign that on a cognitive level, the leader sees the optimal level of identity on a lower level, than he or she actually is. Hence, this can be an indicator that the mindset is on a lower development stage than the real actions of the leader.

During the research project, it turned out, that the definitions provided by Hammond et al. (2017) of each level were highly useful for the interpretation of the data. The fact, that in the beginning most of the leaders were on the individual level and later developed further to the relational or collective level supports that identity development took place. Nevertheless, it turned out that the two dimensions (level of identity and meaning of leadership) do not have to be on the same level. In one case the level of identity was for example rated as low, and the meaning of leadership was on the medium level. Another case showed a higher rating at the level of identity compared to the meaning of leadership. This indicates that these two dimensions of the leader identity do not necessarily have to develop at the same time, which underlines the complexity of the leader identity development. In order to become a strong leader all dimensions of the leader identity have to be highly developed.

Now, before analysing and discussing which of the triggers named in the transfer of training analysis influenced which development, the triggers itself will be interpreted. Concerning the triggers of learning and in a further step also the triggers of change, the data analysis indicated a broad range of possible factors. Previous research already highlighted that training design plays an important role by transferring training content to the daily business life (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Massenberg et al., 2016). This point was confirmed by the present analysis of the data. It was shown that according to the participants of the training different elements of the training design were triggering some specific learning effects.
Thereby, the theory of identical elements was mentioned (van der Locht et al., 2013). Previous research stated that identical elements should be used in order to trigger transfer of training. However, this was somehow questioned by one statement of the analysed leaders, as he stated that for a long-term effect general valid content would be more helpful. Although, this was only one statement, it is possible to deviate some new insights of it. First of all, it has to be said that the transfer of training research is often very short-term oriented, which explains the use of the theory of identical elements. By analysing short-term transfer, present research supports the view that identical elements have a positive influence. However, by looking at a more long-term transfer, which is necessary for identity changes, the theory of identical elements cannot be confirmed, as for a long-term influence the more general valid contents were shown to be more helpful. This point also provides one explanation why theory was named most often as trigger of learning.

Another issue which arose by interpreting the theory as a trigger, was the theoretical orientation of the training. Although the analysed training used different elements like exercises, case studies or discussions as well, there always was a strong theoretical focus. However, these theoretical concepts were very practically oriented and provided a solid foundation for all other training elements, hence it was seen as very important for the trainees.

The second most named trigger were the exercises. The exercises often included business simulations, which reminded the trainees of their own situations in their companies. It can be assumed, that this is a reason for the high rated triggering effect. As other researchers pointed out, a training is more effective if the trainees can connect the content to their work life (van der Locht et al., 2013). This is supported by the practical exercises and therefore seen as a positive influence on the transfer of training. Moreover, it was conspicuous that especially the exercises often lead to a self-analysis of the participants. This self-analysis can be a valuable start for improving the leadership capabilities, which is the goal of such leadership trainings.

The exercises were connected to discussions, as these were often a consequence of an exercise. The discussions can be seen as a trigger of indirect transfer as it was described by Nikandrou et al. (2009). Within the discussions the leaders could share their perspectives with the others and compare their own leadership style, which initiated reflections about themselves. Moreover, during these discussions the leaders were influenced by their peers, which can be seen as one trigger of leader identity development (Komives et al., 2005).
Lastly, the case studies were also seen as having an influence on the learning outcome of the trainees. As already mentioned by analysing the exercises, the reason for that could be the practical orientation of case studies. By analysing a case of another company, the leaders were able to establish connections to their own job which helped them to understand the theoretical methods better.

Concerning the training design, one more point needs to be considered. As the analysed training was divided into three sessions. There was some time in between which the participants could use to reflect about the previous session. This fact and also repetitions of the learned content at the beginning of the next session can be seen as factors, which could influence a long-term transfer. It can be assumed that if a training only lasts one weekend, the participants do not have to deal with the topics over a longer time period and this might be negative for the transfer of training. Especially, for influencing the leader identity development, which is long-term oriented, the results of this analysis indicate that a training design which stretches over more than one weekend has a positive influence on the identity.

Besides the training design the trainee characteristics have been seen as a crucial factor for a transfer of training by previous researchers (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Bhatti & Kaur, 2010; Massenberg et al., 2016; Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008). As there was no information about the transfer motivation in the present research project collected, the focus of the discussion will now be on the self-efficacy of the leaders. As according to Bandura (1986), people who have a higher self-efficacy formulate more challenging goals for themselves. This factor was explored by analysing the formulated plans of the leaders.

Most of the plans which were developed for later implementation of the leaders had to do with the leadership of employees. As these plans were formulated in autumn 2015 this result goes perfectly in line with the fact that the majority of the leaders have been on the individual level at this time, which means that they were mainly concentrated on themselves and not on their employees (Hammond et al., 2017). Therefore, the insights of the training led them to rethink their relationships to their employees and thus, they formulated concrete steps on how to handle this issue in the future. Due to the research gap on the topic of the influence of leadership trainings on the leader identity development, there are no other studies identifying similar results. However, Lord (2016: 129) stated that “with increasing skill, it is thought that leaders are able to shift their focus from concern with their own emergence as leaders, to their impact on others, and to understanding others at a deeper, more principled level.” This statement supports the interpretation of the present results. Another connection can be seen to the factor
“recognizing interdependencies” (Zheng & Muir, 2015). As this factor is part of the leader identity development, and expresses that the focus shifts from the leader to the followers.

The plans concerning the redefinition of leadership have already been discussed above. Few leaders planned a change in their communication. Although this could have been seen also as part of the leadership of the employees, as communication is seen as an essential factor of leadership, it was decided to create an own category for that, as communication is necessary with supervisors or customers as well. The research of DeRue & Ashford (2010) suggested that by claiming and granting a leader identity communication is necessary. However, it has to be pointed out that in their research the communication was often done indirect, e.g. via actions. Nevertheless, the plans for improving the communication can be seen as having a positive influence on the leader identity development.

In order to link these points now to the analysis of the trainee characteristics, it can be said, that all of the plans were quite ambitious. The range included for example leaders who wanted to do a complete redefinition of their understanding of leadership, leaders who planned a new division of work and leaders who wanted to improve their sense giving for their employees. Although this interpretation is very generalized, overall it can be said that the leaders seemed to have high self-efficacy by formulating such goals.

Another point which was analysed by looking at the reflection papers, is the perceived content validity. As it was stated in the conceptual background according to previous research a high perceived content validity indicates a high degree of transfer of training (Bhatti et al., 2013; Jacot et al., 2015). On the one hand the reflection papers can be seen as indicators for the perceived content validity as all leaders did a good job by transferring the knowledge of the trainings to their own cases by writing the reflection papers. On the other hand, the answers to the questionnaires can give further information to that point. In fact, there was one question asking for their evaluation how the training influenced their personal development. 12 of the leaders found it positive or even very positive, and only one rated it as “okay”. If the leaders would not have the opinion that the content of the training was valuable for them, the answers to this question might be worse. Therefore, this research confirms the positive influence of perceived content validity.

However, one point which was mentioned in the previous paragraph, deserves further attention. The participants evaluated the training in a very positive way. As mentioned in the results part, the one who rated the training as not that positive, showed no development in his level of identity and meaning of leadership. The interpretation of this
result led to the assumption that the evaluation of the leaders might be triggered by their own success by applying the training content. Leaders who were more successful are assumed to have rated the influence of the training on their personal development higher, than leaders who had experienced only low success by implementing their plans. Hence, these results indicate that evaluations of past trainings are influenced by the personal transfer of training success of the individual leader.

Previous research accredits post-training activities as an important influence factor to the transfer of training (Lim & Morris, 2006). In the analysed leadership training, submitting reflection papers can be considered post-training activities. The content of the reflection papers can be seen as the so-called "action planning" after the training, which is not only interpreted as indicating a highly perceived content validity but also has a positive influence on the transfer of training. With the submission of the reflection papers the trainees were forced to rethink all concepts and try to find concrete examples of application. The present results confirm this point, as the statements in the reflection papers as well as in the questionnaires showed that the reflection about the learned content by writing these papers, forced the leaders to rethink their situation and therefore was seen as positive influence on the realization of their plans.

Besides the training design factors, there were some factors like the support of the supervisors or colleagues which were only mentioned by some leaders. Interestingly, in the cases where high support was mentioned, the development of leader was below average. This result is conflictive with the previous research, which showed that the work environment and the support of the supervisor and colleagues is important for transferring the knowledge of the training to the company (Chauhan et al, 2016; Holton et al., 2000; Massenberg et al., 2016). The reason for that can be that although support might be important for transferring knowledge of a training to the company, the influence on the personal development is only limited. If a leader wants to strengthen his or her leader identity or he or she wants to further develop the meaning of leadership of him or her, this is a very personal task and the leader has to work on this process on his or her own. Besides the support, similar results were found when there were complex structures and a culture in the company, which was resistant to change. Although this could be seen as a form of low support, there was still a positive progress of the affected leaders. The results of this master thesis indicate that there might be even a positive influence of such structures and cultures on the development. It can be assumed that the low support forces the leader to develop their identity further in order to reach their goals. Closing this topic, this thesis' results show that support might be useful for transferring the plans into the
practice, but for changing the level of identity or the meaning of leadership, there could be no direct relationship found.

Connecting the triggers of transfer with the development of the leader identity, the present research shows the need for an intermediate step. This step is called “triggered action” and was found to be some kind of reflection or self-analysis. The research of Miscenko et al. (2017) and Brown et al. (2011) already stated that self-reflection should be fostered by leadership trainings in order to support long-term changes. The present research supports this point and even provides more evidence for the relevance of reflection. According to the results, in only two cases there was no information given about concrete reflection or self-analysis activities, and one of these two cases showed no development within the two years of research. In the other twelve cases reflection and self-analysis played a big role. The analysis of the reflection papers showed that concretely questioning the current situation and analysing the own actions had an influence on the further development of the leaders. This insight can be linked with the point that leader identity development is a very personal development, which really has to happen in the mind of the leader. Reflections and self-analysis are giving thought-provoking impulses and provide therefore a good starting point for a change in the mindset.

One factor which was mentioned in the questionnaires, answering the question about positive or negative influences on the transfer of training, was time. The trainees stated that time for reflection and conceptual thinking was beneficial for implementing the plans into practice and furthermore, for developing the identity. Although the analysis could not find a direct connection to the level of identity development, this can be seen as a supporting factor for the importance of reflection. As the results point out, leaders who introduced a defined reflection time attributed their development to this fact.
For a better illustration of the results of the interpretation the different levels of identity and meanings of leadership will be brought into connection with the findings of this research in Figure 4. The figure displays that the leadership trainings, which should include various elements for the design of the training, influences the results of the training. In this illustration the results are seen as the reflection and self-analysis which were inspired by participating at the training, and additionally the plans of the leaders for the concrete changes in the future were also seen as a result of the training. In a next step these results trigger a form of development. This can be on the level of identity or by just improving the degree of certainty of a leader. In some cases, the triggered development even influenced the meaning of leadership. However, as this was only proven in few cases, it is not included in the general model. All other factors influencing transfer of training like the trainee characteristics or the training design are indirectly included in the Figure 4. For example, the trainee characteristics were interpreted by the formulated plans. The factor work environment was left out on purpose as within this study, data do not sufficiently depict factors regarding the work environment. Therefore, the model acts as a summary of the empirical work which was done in the context of this master thesis.

5.1. Implications for theory

This study outlines that leadership trainings can influence leader identity development on the long-term and that the use of transfer of training knowledge can lead to new insights
concerning the identity development process. Although it was already known that leadership development programmes should try to influence the identity development (Carden & Callahan, 2007; Ibarra, 2010), the insights provided by the transfer of training literature have not yet been put into practice. The high potential of using leadership trainings for developing a leader identity is emphasized.

Now there will be mentioned several points, which can be seen as the main contributions to the literature about leader identity development: First of all, it has been remarked that reflection and self-analysis after a leadership development training are crucial (Brown et al., 2011), as this has a positive influence on the leader identity development.

Moreover, it was pointed out that the various elements in the training design had an impact on the identity development of the trainees, displaying an insight which could not be found in the research about the leader identity before. Previous research stated that a leader identity develops mainly by practical experiences and by developing interrelations with others (De Rue et al., 2012; Burke, 2006).

One more point contributing to the literature by the empirical analysis is, that leaders can develop on different levels within the dimensions of Hammond et al. (2017). In fact, it was pointed out that a leader can be on the low level concerning the level of inclusiveness while he or she is on the medium level concerning the meaning of leadership. Moreover, the analysis showed that the leaders even can experience a regressive development.

5.2. Implications for practice

As this master thesis dealt with an analysis of leadership development trainings, there can be deviated some implications for practitioners. These implications are relevant for two fields: on the one side there are some elements mentioned for trainers of leadership development programs and on the other side there are some connotations for the leaders, themselves.

The insights found for leadership trainers are as follows: As already Hackman and Wageman (2007: 46) stated the main intention of leadership trainings should not be “what should be taught” but rather “how can leaders be helped to learn”. This statement is reinforced by the results of the thesis, and moreover, an additional emphasis on the initiating of reflection and self-analysis during trainings is recommended. Therefore, trainers of a leadership training should inspire the participants to reflect, which can also be
supported by the design of the training. The thesis showed that a high variety of elements on the training design can have a positive influence on the leader identity development. Moreover, facilitators of a training should be aware of the concept of leader identity in order to concretely implement the idea into the training (Day & Harrison, 2007). This can happen for example by providing new definitions about leadership and furthermore, attempting to do some “sensebreaking” or “identity undoing” (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Nicholson & Caroll, 2013). Additionally, the positive effect of post-training activities is proved to be true by the present master thesis.

For leaders, on the other hand, the results show that identity development should be stimulated, by participating in leadership development programs and by reflecting about the own identity. Thereby, it needs to be understood and accounted for that time is a relevant factor. Although, if the daily business is quite stressful, there should be time for reflection and for conceptual thinking. Additionally, the use of theoretical knowledge can lead to a rethinking of the meaning of leadership, which is one step towards the identity development. Further, the awareness about the importance of development as a leader should be strengthened. All these points, ultimately, will lead to create a more certain leader, who will feel confident by leading his or her employees.

5.3. Limitations

One of the limitations is that all cases are male leaders, because only men answered the questionnaires. This is also caused by the fact that there were in general few women in the training and the answering of the additional questions in the reflection papers as well as the questionnaires were voluntary. However, it would have been interesting if there is a gender difference by analysing the development of leader identity and the triggers of learning.

Another limitation is that only one leadership training was analysed. There exists a high variety in leadership programs with different aims and structures. Therefore, analysing more training programs would have led to further insights and could have helped to increase the external validity of the concept. Additionally, it has to be remarked that the participants of the training were divided in two groups, and in total there were four different trainers who did parts of the training. One of the trainers held each of the three sessions for one group, and the other three trainers did only one of the three days sessions per person. Therefore, differences in the training style can arise which were not considered in the analysis.
Moreover, because of personal relationships which were established to the trainers it is possible that some answers on the questionnaire might be socially desired. This can cause e.g. a better rating of the influence of training on the personal development and could be the reason for the high ratings the training got.

The time frame of the research can also be seen as limitation, as the research project only lasts two years. However, especially the topic of long-term leader development might need a longer time frame, in order to determine more changes.

In connection with the research design, it has to be said that the method of qualitative research also brings some limitations with it. By using qualitative research, the interpretation is always bound to the authors’ subjectivity and it could be that another researcher with a different background does the coding in a different way, which can consequently also influence the findings.

5.4. Further need for research

Literature that combines the transfer of training knowledge with the research about leader identity development is nascent. Hence, further research is needed. The results show that additional value can be created by considering the influence of leadership trainings on the leader identity. In the transfer of training literature, there already exists a lot of knowledge which can be useful for getting new insights in the more recent research direction about leader identity development.

In a future research setting it would be interesting to conduct additional interviews with the leaders during and after the training, and also with some of their followers in order to get more different perspectives on the development. In addition, a focussed analysis of the surrounding at the workplace would be interesting, in order to test the results about the low influence of support factors on the leader identity development. Therefore, besides the interviews, observations could be used to add an additional perspective in the research setting.

Moreover, other leadership training programs should be examined in order to get more information about the individual triggers and their influences on the leader identity. Thereby, different training designs should be compared in order to analyse the influence of different forms of design and also of post-training activities. A more focussed
differentiation between reflection and self-analysis approaches would also be interesting for further expansion of the study's results.

Concerning the leader identity development research, further research will be needed by characterizing the level of identity, because besides the three-level approach, which was used in this paper, there exists a lack of different categorization models for the leader identity. By using other forms of categorization new insights can be expected. Furthermore, a connection between the level of identity and the meaning of leadership should be examined, as it turned out in this research that these can be on different levels (low, medium or high).

Finally, it would be interesting to conduct a research about the factor of defined reflection time concerning the identity development, as this was mentioned as an influencing factor by the leaders.
6. Conclusion

Concluding this master thesis, the main insights and answers to the research problem statement will be summarized. One of the goals of this thesis was to prove if leadership trainings have an influence on the leader identity development and how this influence looks like. The analysis shows that leadership trainings can indirectly trigger leader identity development. Through the participation in leadership trainings reflection or self-analysis can be triggered, which further influences the leader identity development. Interestingly, it was shown that one essential triggering factor is the design of the training. Different elements like theory, exercises, discussions and case studies have an influence on the leader identity in terms of development of the level of inclusiveness and the meaning of leadership. Additionally, it was found that the level of certainty of the trainees also increases by developing the leader identity through participation in leadership trainings.

In sum, it can be said that leadership trainings may play an important role in leader identity development. In future trainings, the design should include more concrete inputs to the topic of leader identity development as this could help to improve the positive influence on the development of the leader identity.
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