

Gendered perceptions of leadership

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Abstract: Previous studies have highlighted gender inequalities in leadership. The under-representation of women in leadership positions, the gender pay-gap, gender discrimination in recruitment are all issues that are widely researched. Business universities are preparing future professionals for leadership in organisations. Its members' perception of leadership is likely to influence organisations in the future and finding and understanding how that perception is gendered will be key to solving some of the current gender inequality issues in organisations.

This thesis studies the impact of gender on leadership and the perception members of a business university have of leadership and how that leadership is gendered. The empirical study focuses on the students and the academic and administrative staff of a Finnish business university. A qualitative research was conducted in the form of in-depth interviews and aimed at understanding how the members of a business university perceive leadership and how that leadership is gendered.

Based on the empirical study, the perception the members of the business university have of leadership is strongly based on the norms and beliefs leadership as a social construct has taught them. Their personal experiences show a difference between how they define leadership as a concept and how they experience leadership. If leadership as a social construct is widely built on male norms, the empirical study found that what is thought to be perceived as an ideal leader is not always true in the experiences the members of the university have had.

This study provides a better understanding for both researchers and organisations of how some gendered practices are perceived and could be avoided. It also highlights how the perception that members of a business university have is affected by the norms of gender and leadership as social constructs. The study also highlights the important role of organisations in the discussions about gender and leadership.

Keywords: gender, leadership, management, career progression, gendered

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1 INTRODUCTION

If women represent today 40% of the workforce, they are still under-represented in top management and leading positions. As an example, in 2015, only 5,2% of the US Fortune500 companies had women as CEOs (Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2015) and globally, the share of companies led by women CEOs is declining (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). A gender pay gap is visible globally and the OECD estimated in 2017, the gender pay gap between the average earnings of men and women, to be in average of 13,5% globally.

If women are under-represented in leadership roles, some studies yet show that women would have natural attributes to lead, thanks to, for instance, certain personality traits required in leading positions that women tend to naturally have (Eagly, 2007, 6). Women (in western countries) also tend to be more likely to pursue higher education studies after high school (Jacobs, 1996).

Other gender inequalities in an organisational context were highlighted by the Global Gender Gap report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2018. According to their research conducted in 149 countries worldwide, not more than 34% of managerial positions are held by women (WEF, 2018). Not only are gender inequalities visible in the parity in managerial positions, women are also unequal to men in terms of access to finances (women have equal access to financial services in only 60% of the countries surveyed) and in terms of political representation and authority (only 17 of the 149 countries of this report have female heads of state) (WEF, 2018). Also, even if in western countries, women are indeed more likely to pursue higher education studies, on a global scale, women are not equal to men in terms of access to education as 20% of girls of a group of 44 countries are illiterate (WEF, 2018). The Global Gender Gap report by the World Economic Forum also discusses the unequal share of unpaid work such as housework. In the 29 countries with data available, women spent on average 50% more time than men doing housework or unpaid work (WEF, 2018).

When women do get to leadership positions, they are subject to very strict expectations and critique (Berkowitz, 2010). Women that are perceived as assertive or forthright tend to be considered as aggressive, worked up and unapproachable. However, men with those traits will be perceived as determined, tough and go-getters (Berkowitz, 2010; Eagly, 2003). The dichotomy in the responses towards male and women is the sign of pre-existing gendered expectations and perceptions we have for our leaders.

The role of a leader by definition is not gendered but our perception of a leader is. If men and women might differ in terms or leadership style, their leadership behaviour usually is not gendered (Eddy, 2009). The specific tasks that are the responsibilities of these leaders are not either specific to men or women. The perceptions we have of leaders today is based on male norms and is socially constructed (Berkowitz, 2010). When men or women behave in either a "feminine" way, in a way not considered masculine enough or in a way that is not considered as fitting to their gender, they can be perceived as unfit for the leadership position (Eddy, 2009).

Differences of course exist between men and women, also in leadership and in an organisational context. But not all differences are however inequalities (Acker, 1990). These differences become inequalities when they can be visible in the disparity between promotion opportunities, rewards, employment security and overall, in work relations (Acker, 1990).

If previous research has indeed focused on the gendering of leadership and tried to explain if and how leadership is gendered, the focus has not been on perceptions. Yet perception seems to be a key element in the understanding of the gendering of leadership. Also, the particular focus on the members of a business university brings a new perspective for this research. This thesis will focus on the gendered perception of leadership, aim at understanding how this perception is gendered and how gender is a socially constructed process. The study will be conducted from the perspective of an educational institution with a focus on how members of an organisation talk about leaders and their expectation of leadership practices.

The organisation that will be studied is a business university; to date, there has only been two empirical studies conducted on gendered perceptions in a higher education institution in the United States (Eddy, 2008; Eddy, 2009). This thesis will be conducted in Finland, that for many years in a row has ranked highest on the list of countries with the lowest gender gap in the world (WEF, 2018). The empirical study of this research will be conducted among students, academic and administrative staff of the business university which will offer a complete understanding of the perceptions the members of the business university have of leadership.

1.1 Research Problem

Gender and leadership, and gender and organisations, are two very common word combinations. For decades, scholars have researched and studied the correlation

between gender and organisations (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000; Acker, 2004; Eagly, 2007). In most cases, the discussion has been centred around the concept of doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Acker, 1990). Indeed, it is often in this organisational setting that gender comes into existence through practices (Acker, 1990).

Gender and leadership have also been a common research field as research. Women are clearly under-represented in leadership, as research has therefore often focused on women as leaders (Eagly, 2003; Eagly, 2007; Berkowitz, 2010; McCarthy, 2017). A recent research from 2019 even concluded that women tend to score higher than men in most leadership skills (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Several other studies have covered the gendering of leadership styles, arguing that women tend be more transactional leaders than men (Eagly, 2007; Eddy, 2009; Weerahannadige, 2012; Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2015).

A common ground for several of these studies is that gender inequality exists in organisations and even more so in traditionally hierarchical organisations. Gender inequalities become clear as the under-representation of women in top management positions is evident (Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2015). Eagly & Carli (2007) have conducted a study on the theory of the labyrinth of leadership. This theory, also explored by McDonagh in 2012, suggests that women need to pass a series of challenges in order to achieve top leadership positions. All in all, there is not one reason to explain the under-representation of women at the top but rather as accumulation of smaller events (Eagly & Carli, 2007; McDonagh, 2012). Another theory related to gender and leadership is the glass ceiling. This theory suggests that a barrier exists in the career progression of women that is related to their gender (Bass & Avolio, 1994). These studies all show the important relationship between gender and leadership and develop several evidences of consequences gender can have on leadership, especially for women.

Gender is a social construct (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Berkowitz, 2010). Social constructionism suggests that meaning and knowledge are socially created (Andrews, 2012) Knowledge is defined as a set of beliefs that individuals have confidence in (Andrews, 2012) and meaning is being discussed as a taken for granted reality that people agree and believe in (Andrews, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004; Berkowitz et al., 2010).

This suggests that gender is being constructed in society and as seen when discussing for instance gender inequalities or career progressions, it is highly based on perceptions.

This study will focus on gendered leadership and on the perceptions members of a business university have of leadership in an organisational context. This setting is valuable as it can be assumed that the academic staff's own perception of leadership is likely to influence the way they teach leadership to the business students. It could also be assumed that the perception that students have and get of leadership and if that perception is gendered or not, will influence them later when they enter the work life and join organisations. Given the above discussions, the following research questions were formulated:

How is leadership perceived by the members of a business university?

How is that leadership gendered?

The empirical research will take a Finnish business university as a case study and interviews will be conducted in order to answer the research question.

1.2 Research Aim

The study aims at getting an understanding of what gendered leadership is from an organisational perspective. In other words, it will discuss the gendered perspective individuals have of leadership in organisations. The empirical research will take a business university as a case study. The interviews conducted among students, professors and the administrative staff will aim at understanding if these groups have a gendered perception of leadership and if yes, how that perception is gendered.

The interviews will aim at understanding how students, professors and administrative staff from a business university perceive leadership and how that leadership is gendered.

1.3 Delimitations

This research will discuss the topic of gender and will focus on male and female as it has been the case in all the literature on gender studied as part of this thesis. Other genders such as intersex, trans-gender, non-binary will not be part of the focus group in this research.

The sample of interviewees will be collected from a Finnish business university in Helsinki. The interviewees will all be members of this university, either as students, professors, or administrative staff. The bachelor students were not chosen as the focus in this research. Master students were chosen as the research deals with the topic of leadership. And it is assumed that master students are more likely to have either work experience working as a leader or working with an individual that is or that they

consider their leader.

This study is taking place in a western country context. The place of the study (Finland) as well as most of the literature is to be considered from a western perspective. Most of the studies and research used in this thesis have been conducted either in Northern America or in Europe. This specification is relevant as gender perceptions might differ from one culture to another. It is also understood that the place and role of women is society might differ greatly in other parts of the world however in this study, we will focus on the inequalities between men and women in a western organisational context.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will be organised in main chapters and sub-chapters. The literature review will have three main focus points: gender as a social construct, gender in organisations and finally leadership as a social construct. It will be followed by a chapter on the methodology used for the empirical research and a chapter on the data collection methods used. Finally, the results of the empirical research will be discussed and managerial implications and suggestions for future research will be explored.

2 KEY DEFINITIONS

Concepts, processes, or theories can have several different definitions in academic literature.

2.1 Leadership / Management

The term management and leadership can sometimes be used as synonyms. In this study, the term management will be used to define a hierarchical position at the top or high on hierarchical scale in an organisation.

Leadership is the ability to influence other people, with or without authority. Therefore, the term leadership will be used to define a leading role, regardless of where this role is on the hierarchical scale in the organisation. Forbes (2013) gives the following definition if leadership: “Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal”.

2.2 Gender / Gendered

Gender is defined by West & Zimmerman (1987) as “the activity through which individuals behave according to normative conceptions of attitude that are appropriate for one’s sex category”. Gender is a process, socially constructed in society, it is the process through which individuals behave and act according to the norms and rules that are expected for their sex category. The term sex is used to define men/women as talking about biological characteristics.

When talking about a “gendered” process, it is assumed that there is a hierarchy between the genders. The definition of a gendered process is a process that gives advantages or disadvantages to one gender more than the other, solely based on the fact that there are male/female (Acker, 1990)

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will serve as a theoretical base for the thesis. It will review the theoretical concepts that form the research problem and is constructed as follows. First, a broader overview of social constructionism followed by a focus on gender as a social construct. Then, the attention will be on gender in an organisational context. The terms gender and gendered will be discussed as an introduction to a review of gender in organisations. Finally, the focus will be made on leadership as a gendered construct.

3.1 Gender as a social construct

This section will begin by focusing on social constructionism and on how we construct perceptions and beliefs from our interactions in society. The next focus will be on gender as a social construct and more precisely on what the perceptions about gender are. The final focus of this section will be on the differences in perceptions that commonly exist depending on if we are perceiving a man or a woman.

3.1.1 Social constructionism

Social constructionism is at the base of the literature review in this research. Social constructionism suggests that meaning and knowledge are socially created (Andrews, 2012). Knowledge is defined as a set of beliefs that individuals have confidence in (Andrews, 2012) and meaning is being discussed as a taken for granted reality that people agree and believe in (Andrews, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004; Berkowitz et al., 2010).

The theory of social constructionism was first introduced by Berger & Luckman in 1966 in their book “The Social Construction of Reality”. This first theory was influenced by several authors whereof Herbert Mead who believed that the construction of identity was influenced by social interaction (Andrews, 2012). Since then, the definition and meaning of social constructionism has been widely discussed among scholars. Young & Collin (2004) defines it as the belief that knowledge is influenced, shaped and constructed by social factors. Young & Collin (2004) argue also that interpretations are shaped by social factors and that the social world is composed of social processes and relational practices. Social constructs are yet constantly changing. They have through times always been highly influenced by political changes, economic conditions and history and are expected to continue to do so (Berkowitz et al., 2010).

It is also argued that social construction is very likely to vary between cultures (Peterson, 2012). Social constructionism should not refer to universal and existing domains but rather to new concepts being developed, complex processes and different systems of reference (Peterson, 2012). The interpretations made of a symbol or almost anything is highly related to culture and context. Different parts of the world can interpret the same situation in very different ways.

However, Wilson & Tagg (2010) and Berkowitz et al. (2010) all want to be cautious with our interpretation of knowledge and meaning as the latter are based on assumptions from unproblematic observations of the world. Therefore, there would not be any objective reality. The existing knowledge is a construction of "realities" and therefore constructed on observations and perceptions (Wilson &Tag, 2010; Berkowitz et al., 2010).

Social constructionism can in many ways be seen as the opposite of positivism. If positivism refers to the belief that simply by observation, one should be able to see the true nature of the world and that what exists is what we perceive to exist (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Burr (1995) agrees and adds that social constructionism gives a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge. It suggests using a very critical eye even regarding our own assumption and regarding how things seem to be. (Burr, 1995)

Language is undoubtedly a crucial factor in social constructionism. It is through language that individuals share thoughts and feelings and ultimately create concepts (Burr, 1995 in Andrews, 2012). Individuals, using language, pass on their experience and perceptions which ultimately shapes the way the world is being perceived (Andrews, 2012). These concepts often last in time as they are being widely spread and even passed on to future generations (Peterson, 2012). Language is a very powerful tool for managers and leaders. They are able, through an agile use of language, to vehiculate the right message to others (Conger, 1991). Conger (1991) gives the example of how a hierarchy can be created simply by using different words to explain a situation. He explains how one person could explain a task as "you have to cut stone" or could phrase it as "you have to build a cathedral". By using a more flattering description of the task, the messenger can give more or less importance to the task and to the role of a person. The messenger can in that way create a hierarchy between two persons simply by using different words. Here, the cathedral builder will be considered above the stone cutter even if the end task might be the same (Conger, 1991).

3.1.2 Gender or gendered?

The word gender was first introduced in the French language in 1125. It was at the time used to classify humans in a variety of ways such as sex or race (Posey, 2016). If in the past, the word gender has been used to define sex in a biological manner, scholars today make a distinction between the words sex and gender. Gender has to be distinguished from sex that is determined based on biological criteria and generally categorises individuals as male or female (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The difference between gender and sex is separated into biological and social definitions (Posey, 2016).

Several definitions exist of gender. Acker (1990) and West & Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is not a physical or biological characteristic but is more of an achieved social status. It is a status that an individual builds based on social norms, cultural and physiological means (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Lorber (1994) believes that gender is a social institution and therefore has to deal with the process of building social statuses for the assignment of responsibilities and rights. Scholars thus seem to agree on gender being a tool or structure for the creation of a social status. Gender has also been defined as a process in the way that it is through the process of gender that individuals learn the specific characteristics that will define “man” and “woman” (Lorber, 1994).

There is the need to make a distinction between gender and gendered. If gender is referring to a status, gendered (processes) are processes that puts a hierarchy between genders. They are means that will give advantages and control to one gender more than the other (Acker, 1990). As soon as an individual is born, parents and doctors will check their sex on the basis of what their genitalia looks like. And it is from that moment onward that the education and behaviour towards the child will become gendered (Lorber, 1994).

Gendered roles are the attitude individuals are expected to have based on their gender (Lorber, 1994). These gendered processes are especially visible in an organisational context where conscious or unconscious gendered decisions are made (Eddy & Cox. 2008). They give the examples of recruitment decisions, initiatives or pay differences that are made based on gendered patterns.

3.1.3 Perception of gender

Berkowitz et al. (2010) argues that gender is a social construct. The perception one has of gender and of the different expectations and “norms” for a gender are built since early

childhood all through an individual's life. Children are taught how to perform gender first by their parents and later by their teachers and all throughout their lifetime by the society around them (Berkowitz et al., 2010). Gender is a social construct as it is the result of the perception individuals have of the behaviour and look of certain individuals. As a society, we agree on a common perception of gender, this makes the perception of gender a social construction.

In their research, Berkowitz et al. (2010) interviewed students on what made a man a man and a woman a woman. The students answered "genitalia". However, they also associated physical features such as skirts, long hair or a certain walking style with a particular gender, in this case with the female gender. Masculinities and femininities are not pre-existing rules that individuals internalize growing up but rather are concepts being built during and from interactions (Berkowitz et al., 2010; Marvin & Grandy, 2012).

West & Zimmerman (1987) introduced the term of **doing gender**. They believe that gender is something people in society do and construct through their actions, their movements and their gestures (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Acker, 1990; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Kelan, 2010; Tienari & Nentwich, 2012). Tienari & Nentwich (2012) give the example of a young transsexual woman who, in order to appear as a woman to society, would start wearing make-up, talk in a higher pitched voice and dress in a more feminine way. Gender is not something one possesses but rather as a set of actions and interactions that will be perceived as being feminine or masculine in nature (Marvin & Grandy, 2012).

Gendered traits, attitudes, expectations and even colours are deeply engrained in our society. Lorber (1994) gives the example of colours that children of both sexes are being attributed. For instance, light, soft and pink colours will often be linked to girls whereas darker or blue colours will be linked to boys. These are examples of how individuals unconsciously do gender on a daily basis. It is through clothing, attitudes, naming and gender name markers that a sex category becomes a gender status. (Lorber, 1994).

3.1.4 Differences in perceptions of male/female

We have to make a distinction between descriptive norms and sociocultural norms. Descriptive norms relate to characteristics or features that men or women are perceived as actually having. Sociocultural norms in the other relate to feature, characteristics or behavior that men or women should have, according to society (Thompson & Pleck, 1986). One could use the examples stated earlier: male traits often include symbols of

masculinity such as strength, confidence or even details like short hair.

Berkowitz et al. (2012) discuss the existence of a hierarchy between genders. The power and dominance that men tend to have over women creates a hierarchy of genders (Berkowitz et al., 2012). Ely (1995) goes further by suggesting that this hierarchy between genders is the most visible in numbers. It is because the numbers show that women are over-represented in the lower part of the hierarchical organisational scale and under-represented in top leading positions that a hierarchy of gender has emerged, placing men above women (Ely, 1995).

Communication is one aspect of society that is gendered. Male norms in society allow men to be more direct, to take charge and be more directive. Women on the other hand, according to societal rules should stay more reserved, nice and overall non-confrontational. Women are also encouraged to rather talk about suggestions in the form of questions rather than by offering their opinion or ideas in a straightforward way (Eddy, 2009). There is also an expectation from society for women to keep more discreet and therefore might tend to simply "take their place" in organisations. This behaviour of staying back often negatively impacts women's career progression opportunities (Gherardi, 1994).

There can also be some limits to the male dominance in society. Indeed, the dominant, strong, self-confident image that society expects from men can also limit their freedom to express emotions that could be considered as feminine (Berkowitz et al., 2010) For instance, if men are seen crying, it can easily be interpreted as a weakness. Whereas if women are seen crying, it will be seen as a sign of emotion, empathy or even kindness (Berkowitz et al., 2010).

Men are also less likely to overall seek help when needed (Vogel, 2011). The authors theorise that this habit is deeply engrained in the male gender role and that makes it hard for people to change. Indeed, gender roles are learned early in childhood and are widely accepted by everyone in society (West & Zimmerman, 1987). There is a self-stigma that men have internalised regarding the seek for help. This stigma relates to their dominant position and to the society's expectations for them to keep that role (Vogel et al., 2011).

3.2 Gender in organisations

After defining how gender is built and done from a broader perspective, the focus in this section will be on gender in organisations. It will start by addressing the question of how

organisations are gendered. Secondly, it will focus on the gender inequalities that exist in organisations before concluding on the impact of gender on career progression.

3.2.1 Gender in organisations

Acker (1990) argued that organisations should not be considered as gender-neutral entities in which employees would behave in a gendered way but rather as the environments in which gendered assumptions and norms are created and reproduced. At the time, that was a ground-breaking approach to the question of gender in organisations, as usually, it has been assumed that organisations are gender neutral (Britton, 2000). Ely (1995) also challenges the approach to organisations as a gender neutral entity and completes Acker's argument by adding that an organisation is the environment for ongoing social constructions in which consequences and meaning will differ for every person (Ely, 1995).

Acker (1990) also makes the distinction between the job and the worker. She explains that a job per se is indeed gender neutral. It is a set of responsibilities, tasks or competencies. In order to fill this abstract job, there is a need for an abstract worker. Acker (1990) explains that this would mean finding a worker that does not have any other obligations outside of work. But as women are often the ones taking responsibilities of extra-work (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Auspurg, 2017), such a disembodied worker is more likely to be a man. Therefore, a job can in reality never be gender neutral (Acker, 1990).

Britton (2000) has researched the elements that can help one identify if an organisation is gendered or not. Some of the criteria would include to determine if the organisation is inherently gendered (Britton, 2000). An inherently gendered organisation is an organisation built on processes, concepts and beliefs that make a distinction between men and women and between feminine and masculine as it was discussed by Acker (1990). Another criterium is the male or female domination within not only the organisations but also in specific occupations. The final criterium to define in an organisation is gendered is to see if the organisation is referred to or ideologically described in terms of a discourse that focuses on specific masculinities or femininities (Britton, 2000).

Gherardi (1994) takes a stand on the binary aspect of gender in organisations. She argues that all positions and tasks are gendered, either with a male tag or a female tag and gives the example of the position of secretary. She explains that the simple word

secretary connotates a female, working for a higher ranked man, with a very specific set of skills (Gherardi, 1994). Gherardi's argument on the gendering of positions and tasks resonates with Acker's (1990) argument that there is no true gender neutral position. Gherardi's argument on the binary gendering of positions is also in accordance with Britton's (2000) arguments regarding the gendering of organisations and is a perfect example of social constructionism. The word secretary as such is a neutral word, it only has a female connotation because this concept has become a social construct.

3.2.2 Existing inequalities in companies

Gender inequalities are a problem when they discriminate men or women only on the base on their gender (Acker, 1990). Gender inequalities are very visible in an organisational context where inequalities exist on all levels and on all fronts. The gender pay gap is only one of the examples of the disparities between men and women at the workplace.

Not all differences are however inequalities. A manager will earn more than a trainee, CEOs have more power than assistants, etc. (Acker, 1990). These differences are here justified as the positions are different. Acker defines inequalities in an organisational context as the "systematic disparities between participants". These differences become inequalities when they can be visible in the disparity between promotion opportunities, rewards, employment security and overall, in work relations (Acker, 1990).

Gender inequalities have been widely studied and discussed in various fields, for instance within higher education (Jacobs, 1996) or leadership (Eddy, 2009; Berkowitz, et al., 2010). However, in this section, the focus will stay on the inequalities that exist within organisations. Scholars have identified some areas as being the most common inequalities individuals experience in organisations due to their gender. Those areas are a gender pay gap, a difference in the work/life balance expectations and an overall non-equal representation of both genders in organisations. (Acker, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Weerahannadige, 2012; Kelan, 2010)

The gender pay gap is a widely discussed inequality between men and women in organisations. Even if there have been some improvements, women in 2008 in Europe still earn on average only 82% as much as men (Lips, 2012). Several factors have however been found as contributing to the gender pay gap.

One of the factors has been identified as being the unequal share of unpaid tasks such as household chores or taking care of children (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Auspurg, 2017; Acker, 1990). Auspurg et al. (2017) argues that the likelihood of women of being in charge of such responsibilities in the household might restrict the time they could spend on work at home. Lips (2012) also discusses this tendency of women having more responsibilities in the household and adds that women sometimes even choose to be part-time or full-time housewives, which is much more unlikely for men.

Hoobler et al. (2011) criticise the historical work structure in place today. They explain that this structure creates a hierarchy and inequalities between men and women in organisations and in the persons' careers. Indeed, as it was also discussed by Eagly & Carli (2007) and Auspurg (2017), women are often the ones that will be in charge of the children. Hoobler et al. (2011) discuss how the traditional model of the "ideal worker" involves the expectation from managers to be flexible in the working hours, to be able to do over-time and to prioritise work for the organisation. These expectations are often incompatible with the responsibilities of a mother for instance and therefore explain the inequalities growing between men and women at the workplace (Hoobler et al., 2011; McCarthy, 2017; Lips, 2013).

Venable (2002) however does not believe in the existence of a pay gap as a sign of gender inequality. She argues that often, women not achieving to reach jobs with higher salaries and better positions, simply comes from their own lifestyle choice (Venable, 2002). The author explains that this comes from women putting more importance on relationships than on their careers. This argument differs completely from the other opinions expressed before, that see the pay gap as the consequence of the inequalities between men and women in society and in organisations.

The benefits of higher education are also different depending on the gender of the individuals. Research has shown that women are more likely to pursue higher education studies after high school (Jacobs, 1996; Buchmann et al., 2007; Hoobler et al., 2011). Eagly & Carli (2007) discusses a difference in outcomes and benefits in careers. She argues that women's wages do grow more exponentially depending on the length and level of their studies than men's. But with a similar level of studies, women's wages still remain lower than men's (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Venable (2002) explains this dichotomy by the nature of the studies preferred by the different genders. The higher paying fields such as engineering, medicine or law are often preferred by men, when women tend to

be attracted by lower paying fields (Venable, 2002). This tendency is also discussed by Jacobs (1996), Buchmann et al. (2007) and Fernandez-Mateo and Fernandez (2015).

3.2.3 Careers influenced by gender

The term glass ceiling is often used to describe an unacknowledged "barrier" that exists that prevents women from acceding to higher positions in organisations. The "barriers" are often described as being sets of attitudes from society (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Bass & Avolio (1994) truly believe in the existence of a glass ceiling. Their argument is that women statistically make better leaders, both from the leadership styles they tend to adopt and from the performance of the organisations with female leaders. Yet, there is a limit to the career progression of women toward top level positions (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Hoobler et al. (2011) discuss the glass ceiling theory and argue that the main cause of the lack of advancement in women's careers nowadays is the family-work conflict. This conflict, also discussed earlier by McCarthy (2017) and Lips (2013), includes marriage, children or plans of having children. Hoobler et al. (2011) however go even further by arguing that managers, regardless of their gender, tend to use family-work balance as an excuse or a cause for lower performance of female employees. This could therefore explain the slower career progression of women in organisations (Hoobler et al., 2011).

The theory of the glass ceiling is nevertheless criticised. Eagly & Carli (2007) argues that the metaphor is irrelevant and wrong as it suggests that the only barrier and challenge that exist is towards top-level positions. She argues that it is wrong to assume that women and men have the same opportunities for entry and middle-level positions as well (Eagly & Carli, 2007). According to Eagly & Carli (2007), the metaphor of labyrinth of leadership is more relevant as it considers all the small challenges and steps that justify an overall slow progression in women's careers.

The theory of labyrinth of leadership has been discussed by several scholars (Eagly and Carly, 2007; McDonagh, 2012). Eagly and Carly (2007) argue that women, more than men need to go through several challenges in order to get to leadership positions. They believe that there is not one single reason that explain the reason of this difference in experience of both gender but that it is an accumulation of small incidents that explain the under-representation of women at the top (Eagly and Carli, 2007). It is this accumulation that explain the metaphor of labyrinth of leadership (Eagly and Carly, 2007; McDonagh, 2012). As part of this theory, Eagly and Carly (2007 & 2003) discuss

for instance: Vestiges of prejudice, resistance to women's leadership, leadership styles, demands of family life and in-adapted management structures.

Hoobler et al. (2011) have also argued about the consequences of the under-representation of women in leadership positions. They found that this leads to women not taking the opportunity to seek or ask for a promotion. Women may think that they are not, as women, fit to take upper management positions (lack of representations) or may negatively judge the company culture that would seem discriminatory (Hoobler et al., 2011). Acker (1990) also discussed how the "all-male" representations of upper managements and boards affected women and made women seem unfit or un-welcomed to join such a group. This resonates with what Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez (2015) found from their research. They found that female managers were less likely than male managers to apply for management jobs and that often the reason given is the fear or expectation of being discriminated against in leading positions (Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez, 2015).

Venable (2002) gives a final argument to explain the difference in career progression differences between men and women. As women get children, they will take maternity leaves, which will constitute a break in their career. Even though this break can be more or less long, it still is more important than the paternity leave that the father can take (Venable, 2002). She argues that women suffer from going back and forth to the job market. The career breaks or the part-time work, influences women's careers negatively as they will earn less years of experience, unlike men that will for the most, not take extend paternity leaves for instance and keep pursuing their professional career despite having children (Venable, 2002).

3.3 Leadership: a social construct

3.3.1 Perception of leadership

When looking for a definition of leadership, the most common one seems to be the following: "Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximises the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal." (Forbes, 2013). This definition is being completed by Hersey et al. (1979) that add the question of power to the discussion around leadership. They discuss the responsibility of power that leaders are given as part of their role (Hersey et al., 1979). The terms leadership and leader must not be mistaken with the terms management and managers. Indeed, the two latter refer to hierarchical statuses within an organisation and to the actual role of manager (Forbes, 2013).

As the definition suggests, leadership or leader is more of a role of social influencer rather than a hierarchical position. Research has been conducted to understand how leaders are being created in society and within organisations (Türetgen et al., 2017). It is widely admitted that a leader is very much separate from the hierarchy, leaders can be found in all levels in an organisation or in society (Emrich., 1999; Türetgen et al., 2017).

People create in their minds, an image of what a leader should be. They identify certain characteristics or traits that they themselves believe a person should have to be a leader. Once they meet a person or a manager, if that person has those traits or characteristics, they will most likely categorise him or her as a leader (Türetgen et al., 2017). Emrich (1999) also came to the same conclusion but however adds that there is no study that shows that people are aware of the consequences (positive or negative) that those specific traits have on a leader, their choice of characteristics can therefore be biased and not represent the ideal traits in reality (Emrich, 1999).

Several studies have tried to define what traits are considered as leader traits. Türetgen et al. (2017) discuss for instance conscientiousness and extraversion. However, effectiveness seems to be a common theme among the study results (Türetgen et al., 2017; Jones et al., 1975; Emrich, 1999; Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Zaccaro & Banks., 2004). Zaccaro & Banks (2004) break down the idea of effectiveness into cognitive abilities, personality, motives, values, problem-solving skills, social appraisal skills and expertise/knowledge. Spears (2010) gives his own interpretation of a leader's characteristics and names listening, empathy, strength, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building communities. The difference in interpretations could partly help confirm Türetgen et al.'s (2017) theory according to which all individuals make their own cognitive interpretation of what traits a leader should have. This could explain the lack of a universal list of traits.

Context has been identified as influencing individuals' perceptions of leadership. In a situation where things are considered as going well, the person identified as a leader will be praised, whereas in a situation where things are considered as not going so well, the leader will be blamed (Emrich, 1999; Zaccaro & Banks, 2004)

The perceptions individuals have of leaders can also be gendered. Berkowitz et al. (2010) & Hoobler et al. (2011) argue that women are seen as unfit to be leaders, it is mostly because of their feminine attitude and attributes. The perception of leaders is often based

on male norms and society overall gives men the advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Chapman, 1975). Thus, femininities make women (or men with such traits) seem unfit for the role of leader. Some of those traits were identified as being a shallow and soft tone of voice, a certain posture, a certain look, among other things. (Berkowitz et al., 2010).

Eagly & Carli (2003) discuss that individuals in an organisation tend to prefer male leaders, arguing that this relates to men being closer to the men norms that the ideal leader is based on. But they go even further by suggesting that there is an inequality of standards between men and women. Women would usually be held to a higher standard of competencies than men due to the doubts in their abilities (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Women suffer from prejudice, misconceptions and overall resistance in the selection process to leadership positions (Eagly, 2007).

3.3.2 Different leadership styles

Men and women, once in a leadership position, are expected to fulfil the same requirements in terms of competency and attitude regardless of their gender (Eagly, 2007). However, they are still given some freedom as to how they execute their role and are notably adopting their own preferred leadership style (Eagly,2007). The co-relation between gender and leadership style is relevant as soon as stereotypes exist of women and men in leadership roles, which is the case (Van Engen et al., 2010).

Chapman (1975) defines leadership styles as "the underlying need for structure of the leader which motivates his behaviour in various leadership situations and infers the consistency of goals or needs over different situations". A leadership style should not be confused with leadership behaviour, that unlike a leadership style, is not constant and will evolve depending on the situation (Chapman, 1975). Eddy (2009) however wants to be cautious and argues that leadership behaviours are not always stereotypically gendered and claims the importance of context when it comes to differences in leadership styles or behaviours.

Women in leadership positions might suffer from stereotypes such as women being seen as too sensitive, not strong and not directive enough to be good leaders. Women leaders therefore tend to develop masculine traits, that are more socially accepted for a leader (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Research yet shows that women tend to have qualities/traits such as sensitivity, attention to detail or empathy that have shown to be of great need in leadership positions (Eagly, 2007). As for men, it is argued that they tend to share traits such as authority, power and control, which are often expected from a leader.

(Chapman,1975)

Van Engen et al. (2010) qualify people-oriented style of leadership as a stereotypical feminine style. They also qualify a task-oriented and structured style as a stereotypical masculine style. Chapman (1975) also admits a tendency for female leaders to be more relationship oriented than male leaders, he however argues that such a preference is more likely to be a leadership behaviour (meaning being affected by the current context) than by a leadership style (that unlike a leadership behaviour, stays constant regardless of the context) (Eddy, 2009; Chapman, 1975). Women are seen as more likely to form coalitions and to work in groups to achieve a common goal while men in coalitions tend to prioritise personal interests (Eddy, 2009; Chapman, 1975).

Loden (1985, in Eagly & Johnson, 1990) comes to the same conclusion by opposing male and female leaders on several characteristics. Men as leaders, would be characterised by traits such as controlling, unemotional, competitive and analytical problem solvers. Whereas women would be characterised as emotional, cooperative, low control and problem solving based on feelings and intuition (Loden 1985, in Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Mavin & Grandy (2012) however suggest than in order to be successful, female leader should act with a behaviour made of both masculinities and femininities. They should have a mix of inspirational motivation (considered as being a masculinity) and of individualised consideration such as nurturing or mentoring (considered as being more of a femininity) (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). Eddy (2009) talks about a dilemma that women would have between either bending and acting a male role or going with their own more genuine leadership style, that does not follow the (male) leadership norms. He yet concludes that women will always have to bend in order to be accepted as a leader (Eddy,2009). Mavin & Grandy (2012) also argue that men who would not follow these male norms of leadership might lose credibility as a leader and might appear as less effective to other people.

Zenger & Folkman (2019) conducted a study to conclude that women rated higher on leadership capabilities. They justify these results by women in leadership's tendency to take initiatives, to be driven for results, to value self-development and to have high honesty and integrity. A study by Sczesny et al. (2004) however argue very differently. They conducted a study on the perception of female leaders and write that male students were more likely to describe female leaders as easily influenced, nervous or uncertain than being described as ambitious, objective or competent (Sczesny et al.,

2004).

All of the above pictures a rather gendered perception of leadership. Male and female leader suffer from gendered expectations when it comes to leadership style, leadership capabilities and personality traits. Those who fail to rise up to these gendered expectations for a leader might lose credibility as a leader and suffer from criticism from subordinates or society.

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will detail and discuss the research design choices that were made for the empirical study. It will discuss the research design, the sampling strategy and finally the data collection and analysis.

4.1 Research design

The research design process in a study aims at defining the process that will be used to answer the research questions (Patton, 2002).

An induction strategy aims at collecting data and information to create general rules and prove a specific fact. It is often used to create and develop new theories from the data that has been collected and analysed (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). A deductive strategy is often used to test hypotheses or theoretical propositions using research strategies that have been specifically designed to be tested (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). In this study, primary information will be collected both through an online survey and with the use of in-depth interviews. The data collected from the preliminary online survey will allow for a comparison with the data collected through interviews.

Abduction is a research strategy, distinct from deduction and induction. It is the method that was chosen in the case of this study. Abduction is a form of reasoning that perceives a said phenomenon as related to other observations. These observations can either be creating new general descriptions, proving a cause and effect co-relation that is not visible at first or prove the similarity between the said phenomenon and previous phenomenon already researched and experienced in a different setting or situation (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Overall, is the process of creating an explanatory hypothesis based on observations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction can be seen as a part of grounded theory, that refers to research strategies in which theories are being developed from the data collected during a series of interviews and/or observations (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). In studies relying on abduction, the initial framework can be changed or modified depending on empirical findings (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In the case of this study, the preliminary survey will allow for observations and later comparison, which may affect the initial research questions.

A qualitative study will be conducted as part of the empirical study of this thesis and in-depth interviews will be conducted as the primary data collection method. The interviewees will only be known after the preliminary survey is completed as the latter

will also act as a platform for the respondents to volunteer for the interviews. Despite the fact that the survey will be sent out to members of the business university regardless of their position, three main groups can be considered: (master's degree) students, professors and administrative staff. A qualitative research will allow for the study of few cases more in depth and focus on opinions, experiences, insights and feelings. (Patton, 2002, Gioia, et al., 2012) The interviews will all be in-depth and open-ended.

Case studies are suitable to capture an in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon or situation under interest single setting (Saunders & Lewis, 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989). In-depth case studies are the best tool to understand the interaction between phenomena and their context (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this study, the case study will be the business university. The interviews will all be conducted among members of this university and the research aim is to understand how leadership is perceived among the members of the said business university.

4.2 Data Collection

The aim of the empirical research is to understand how members of a business university perceive leadership and to see if that perception of leadership is gendered. In consequence, it seems necessary to collect primary data (Patton, 2002). Primary data collection will allow the understanding of how an individual or a group of individuals perceive a particular issue (Saunders & Lewis, 2014). Our perceptions are highly influenced by our culture, background and upbringing as seen in the literature review. Therefore, perceptions can be considered as highly personal, which justifies the benefits of conducting interviews. Interviews allow the collection of insights and opinions that are not visible from the outside and that requires an in-depth approach (Saunders & Lewis, 2014).

As part of the research, a short survey will be sent out among the members of the business university in the beginning of the empirical study. It will serve as a primary sample and will be a good base for observations of the data collected. This survey will also give the respondents the opportunity to volunteer to take part in an in-depth interview later. The survey will be an online survey and consist of a few semi-structured questions and aim at getting a first understanding at how the respondents perceive leaders and leadership.

4.2.1 Preliminary survey

A preliminary survey was created electronically and distributed to students, academic and administrative staff within Hanken. The survey template is available as Appendix 2.

The survey aimed at evaluating members' of Hanken perception of leadership. The aim of the study is not only to understand their perception of leadership but also find out if their perception of leadership is gendered and how. As gender is a rather sensitive topic, the choice was made not to explicitly include questions about gender in the preliminary survey. This allowed for more honest and spontaneous answers on the topic of gender in the interviews. This was done in order to prevent bias as some answers might have been thought out and prepared in advance.

Some of the questions in the preliminary survey were identical in the interview however the survey helped getting an overall understanding on certain topics whereas the interviews allowed for a more in-depth conversation and the researcher was able to ask follow-up questions. The answers collected in the preliminary survey presented many similarities but also discrepancies. For instance, on the questions regarding the respondents' perception of themselves as a leader, it was not possible to create a pattern based on gender, age of role but there was an almost 5050 response for positive and negative answers.

The answers collected in the preliminary survey helped shape the interview guide. Some of the questions of the survey that presented for instance clear similarities or discrepancies were kept in mind during the interviews with the thought of getting a more in depth understanding and explanations of these differences. Some insights from the preliminary survey were taken into account during the analysis.

4.2.2 In-depth interviews

Interviews as a data collection method is the most appropriate data collection method as they allow for the collection of information regarding personal feelings, experiences and opinions (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) describes the purpose of in-depth interviews to be the access to information such as experiences and opinions, that could not be collected through other data collection methods such as for instance observations. In the context of this study, it will allow the researcher to collect insights, comments and experiences about perceptions.

In total, eight interviews were conducted as part of this study. The interviewees either volunteered after answering the preliminary survey or answered to an interview request. As this research was focusing on members of the business university as a whole, it was important to find interviewees from different groups to give a good representation of all the members of the university. Four students, three persons from the academic staff and

one person from the administrative staff were interviewed. The interviews were conducted between the 9th and the 20th of December 2019. Six of the interviews were conducted face to face, one by Skype and one over the phone. The table 1 below shows the details of every interview that was conducted.

One-to-one interviews were chosen over focus groups as the subject of gender can be seen as sensitive. Focus groups are interviews with several interviewees which limits the effectiveness of the process and might cause some interviewees to not open up fully and share more personal experiences (Patton, 2002). The aim of the study was to collect insights, experiences, feelings and perceptions. Therefore, having one-to-one discussions were the most suitable setting as it secures the integrity of the data collection. Because perception, opinions and beliefs are not visible externally, observations would not have provided an understanding of how the members of the business university perceive leadership as the aim of the study is (Patton, 2002).

The purpose of the interviews was to get an understanding of how they perceived leadership and if that perception is gendered and how. Patton (2002) argues that the purpose of interviews is to get inside the interviewee's head and unfold their perceptions through the questions being asked. In order to understand how the interviewees' perception of leadership could be gendered, the questions mostly focused on their perception of leadership. Questions solely focused on gender were avoided but a gender perspective or a gender lens was taken whilst analysing the data collected to find out how gender was associated to their perception of leadership.

All the interviews were conducted in English and recorded with a smartphone with the permission of the interviewee and field notes were taken as supplementary information as recommended by Patton (2002) and Saunders & Lewis (2014). The interviews lasted between 26 and 56min and were all transcribed into text.

Table 1 Interviews

Interviewee	Role	Method	Date	Lenght
Interviewee 1	Student	Face-to-face	9th of December 2019	38min.
Interviewee 2	Student	Face-to-face	10th of December 2019	26min.

Interviewee 3	Student	Face-to-face	10th of December 2019	37min.
Interviewee 4	Administrative staff	Face-to-face	17th of December 2019	40min.
Interviewee 5	Academic staff	Face-to-face	20th of December 2019	41min.
Interviewee 6	Academic staff	Phone	20th of December 2019	37min.
Interviewee 7	Student	Face-to-face	14th of December 2019	35min.
Interviewee 8	Academic staff	Skype	10th of December 2019	56min.

4.3 Interview guide

An interview guide was created as part of the data collection process. An interview guide can be used in open-ended semi-structured interviews to assure that the researcher keeps a good structure throughout the interview and that all the topics are discussed (Patton, 2002). The topics were predefined, and a few general questions were written down however, the interviews all took a rather conversational aspect and the researcher was able to freely ask questions that fit the theme that was discussed at the time. The interview guide ensured that all the respondents were questioned on the same themes.

The study covers two main elements that are leadership and gender. The respondents were informed that the main topic of the interview would be about their perception of leadership. The interviews started with a focus on leadership and their perception of leaders. The gender perspective was only taken in the second part of the interview. Gender can be a sensitive topic. Therefore, it was important to ensure that the respondents would not prepare answers in advance of the interview, that would not fully reflect their honest opinion on the topic of gender. The conversational aspect of the interviews seemed to ensure a more natural and honest conversation on the matter. The interview guide is available as appendix 1.

The interview guide was structured into four main themes. After a short introductory section aiming at gathering some background information about the role and experience of the interviewee at the business university, the first section was focused on leadership and perceptions of leadership. This section aimed at understanding what leadership and leaders mean for the interviewee. It helped shape an image of how the interviewee had previously experienced and now perceives these concepts. The second section was focusing of their perception of self as leaders. This section aimed at linking the concepts of leadership and leaders to the interviewee him/herself. It gave further insights on their perception of these concepts. The third section was the first part of the interview guide that added a gender aspect to the discussion. The questions were focusing on the relationship between gender and leadership and aimed at revealing how the concepts of leadership and gender are linked in the interviewee's mind. It helped show how in their mind, gender was possibly influencing leadership. The final section of the interview guide focused on gender and leadership in an organisational context. This section was aimed at collecting experiences of situations where gender had affected leadership in an organisation. And potentially finding practical solutions to inequalities that gender might cause.

The two first sections were solely focusing on leadership while the two last sections introduced a gender aspect. As the interviews were more conversational, the questions were not all asked in the exact same order during the interviews, but the order of the section was respected. This allowed the researcher to ask complementary questions when needed.

4.4 Sampling

The sampling method that was used for the data analysis is purposeful sampling as this method is recommended for qualitative studies. It allows for an in-depth study of the collected data through the selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). The purposeful sampling strategy was chosen with the preliminary investigation in mind.

In this research, a grounded theory approach was used. Indeed, it allows for the development of theories from data after a series of interviews and/ or observations are made (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). As the data collection process progressed, a theoretical sampling was made. After the research topic and the research questions were confirmed or identified, a poll all interviewees was created based on a set of criteria.

The purpose of choosing a sampling strategy is to select the most "information-rich cases" for the study. (Patton, 2002). As this research uses one organisation as a case study, the business university, the entire population considered in the study is limited to one group. This group includes students, academic and administrative staff. In a purposeful sampling, the researcher also selects the purposeful sample that he/she judges to be the most appropriate for the study (Patton, 2002; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The logic and benefit of purposeful sampling lays in the emphasis of in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002).

4.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis method that was used in this study is suggested by Spiggle (1994) and consists of a set of operations to be used at various moments of the analysis. These operations are categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation and integration (Spiggle, 1994). The different operations of data analysis have been discussed by Patton (2002), Spiggle (1994) and Gioia et al. (2013). The purpose of these operations is to help researcher with the organisation of data, a more precise data extraction, the creation of hypotheses and will also help formulating conclusions (Spiggle, 1994). Gioia et al. (2013) believe that the interviews and their analysis should also be considered together given their close link in the process.

The purpose of data analysis is to sort out, reduce and reconstitute data in order to transform complex units into more comprehensive parts (Spiggle, 1994). After the analysis is completed, the research shall focus on interpretation. When interpreting the data, he/she will find what abstract concepts can be constructed from the data that has been collected (Spiggle, 1994; Patton, 2002). The abstract concepts can be patterns, perspectives or phenomena. Overall, interpretation gives the researcher, an understanding of the data (Spiggle, 1994; Patton, 2002).

In the context of this study this method will allow the researcher to better understand the underlining elements of the respondents' perception of leadership. It will help to highlight what influences their perception of leadership and how that perception can be gendered and in what way.

4.5.1 Data analysis methodology

Categorisation is one of the first operations in the analysis of data as it is through this operation that the researcher will classify or label different units of data (Spiggle, 1994). The units of data can be in the form of words, sentences or paragraphs that are

representative of a more general phenomenon. Categorisation will allow for the filtering of data with the aim to identify the more relevant pieces of data, to label them and to dispose of any irrelevant information (Spiggle, 1994). All the text transcribed from the interviews was reviewed and any piece of data related to leadership, gender, experiences or perceptions were highlighted. The transcripts were analysed using excel and all the relevant data (here quotes from the interviewees) was highlighted separately and isolated.

Gioia (2013) suggests a methodology that is quite similar to Spiggle's (1994) categorisation and abstraction. Gioia (2013) also suggests that the researcher should label and sort out the data in order to find similarities in the different "groups". The methodology suggests three stages to this operation: First order analysis: includes all the ideas collected during the research, it is very precise and detailed. According to Gioia (2013), over 100 categories could exist at this stage. Second order analysis: a narrowed down stage in comparison to the previous one. Main themes are found and will become the only focus. Aggregate dimensions: composed of both the first and second order analyses. This methodology gives the researcher structured data and a visual representation of the evolution when it comes to data analysis from raw data to final conclusions (Gioia, 2013).

The base for the theoretical framework of this research is social constructionism. Looking at the responses collected during the interviews, it was possible to identify four main constructions. These constructions are made of the elements that the interviewees include in their conception of the different concepts discussed. The four constructions that were identified were the construction of leadership, the construction of men and women, the construction of inequalities and the construction of time. After all the interviews were conducted, the researcher was able to identify 25 categories that could be broken down into the four main themes/constructions mentioned above. With abstraction, the researcher groups the identified categories into more general concepts or groups. The abstraction will help create more general groups of categories that share the same features (Spiggle, 1994). After the data collected was coded into categories, it was analysed to find more abstract themes. The abstract coding was partly inductive and partly deductive and allowed the identification of the four constructions: the construction of leadership, the construction of men and women, the construction of inequalities and the construction of time.

Comparison is another operation described by Spiggle (1994). She describes comparison as a method allowing the exploration of the differences and similarities between the pieces of data collected. This step is done as early as in the categorisation stage. It is during the categorisation that those similarities and differences will appear and that they will be labelled accordingly. (Spiggle, 1994). Dimensionalisation comes after the categorisation and the abstraction are complete. Dimensionalisation aims at identifying the constructs and the properties of categories. This means that once the researcher has identified and defined the different categories, he/she can through dimentionalisation explore their characteristics (Spiggle, 1994). Once the categorisation and the abstraction steps were completed in the excel, the researcher examined the data to find relationships between the themes, categories and between the respondents. The following chapter presents the results of the analysis.

Finally, with integration, the researcher builds theories grounded in data (Spiggle, 1994). Spiggle (1994) explains that integration is done in two operations: axial coding and selective coding. Axial coding integrates the categories and constructs determined and defined by the researcher in the previous operations. In axial coding, the researcher creates categories by specifying what the conditions/context were that created that particular construct. The researcher is essentially linking a construct to a context or certain conditions. Selective coding can be considered as a higher level of abstraction. It specifies the relationship between different construct and regroups constructs into larger, more general categories (Spiggle, 1994). The results of this last step are presented in the final chapter of the thesis.

4.5.2 Data analysis process

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed into text, each transcript was reviewed separately and coded in order to organise the raw data. All the element of the interviews that were related to the research aim and/or research questions were exported to an excel file as quotes. Categorisation was done during the coding process and aimed at organising the data and quotes into categories that represent a wider phenomenon. As the aim of the research is to study the interviewees' perception of leadership, the categories all reflect their *perception* on different topics that were discussed in the interviews. After the initial coding round, 25 categories were identified through all the transcripts.

After the categorisation was done and more general categories were created, the data was coded again to find more abstract themes. Abstraction is the process through which practical categories are simplified into more abstract themes (Spiggle, 1994). Five abstract themes emerged: Definition of leadership, men and women as leaders, influences on perception, evolution of leadership and gender inequalities. The table 2 below shows the data categorisation and abstraction.

Table 2 Data Categorisation and abstraction

Theme	**Definition of leadership**	**Men and women as leaders**	**Influences on the perception**	**Evolution of leadership**	**Gender inequalities**
Category	Definition of leadership	Perception of leaders	Culture	Generations	Gender in organisations
	Leadership skills	Female leaders	Stereotypes	History and Future	Discrimination of men as leaders
	Ideal leader	Differences between male and female leaders	Environment	Improvements in gender inequality	Discrimination of women as leaders
	Leadership ambition		Gender roles		
	Becoming a leader		Personal experience	Future opportunities	Underrepresentation of women
	Hierarchy			Reproduction of patterns	Maternity
					Hanken

Table 3 below shows examples of pieces of data as coded after categorisation and abstraction.

Table 3 Example of coded data

Theme	**Category**	**Quote/ Data coded**	**Interviewee**
Men and women as leaders	Female leaders	” But so essentially what is happening is like we are highlighting in this sense, like what women, you know, when a woman gets to a position of power or something or a CEO, we highlighted this as a news.”	1

Definition of leadership	Leadership skills	"I think a leader should be knowledgeable. Like in the sense that's because I think like knowledge brings credibility as well."	3
Definition of leadership	Becoming a leader	"Sometimes people are put in leadership positions and they have to lead, and they do not necessarily want to do so, so well [...] so you can become a leader. You don't have to be born a leader."	5
Gender inequalities	Maternity	"Women are not in the top of the Fortune 500 or wherever in the board because it's hard for them to get there because of family, because of. I just fear that nowadays as a woman, on the one hand, you just have the feeling you have to give up more. So that means as a man, you do not even think of all those. "	7
Influence on the perception of leadership	Gender roles	"I've been in such different contexts, so when I worked in [...] a male dominated industry. There were women there for sure. They had to be very tough and adhere to male stereotypical norms, but that's the industry "	8

Having all the collected data in one same excel files allows and facilitates the comparison between the interviewees' answers and between the different themes are categories. The responses, themes and categories were analysed in order to find both similarities and discrepancies between them. Dimensionalisation helps building theory by defining relationships between different categories and constructs (Spiggle, 1994). With all the data in the same excel file, comparison and dimentionalisation was also made possible very easily and helped find relationship between the different answers' and the themes. The final step of the analysis is integration. With the integration step, the findings and quotes from the interviews are combined with theory.

4.6 Quality of the data

Wallendorf and Belk (1989) identify five main criteria to help the researcher assess the quality of a research.

4.6.1 Credibility

The first criterium is credibility. When assessing the credibility of a research, the research has to consider everything that was done during the collection of data, during the interpretation and in the final interpretation of the research results. (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989) It is even more important to be careful during the interpretation phase.

Indeed, as Gioia et al. (2013) explained in their paper, interpretation is a very personal process that can involve feelings and emotions.

To increase the credibility, Wallendorf & Belk (1989) suggest using triangulation across methods. Triangulation across methods means that the data for the analysis was collected using several different methods. It most often refers to the analysis of primary data. (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989)

In this research, the data was collected through in-depth interviews but also through a preliminary anonymous electronic survey. Notes were also taken during the interview to ensure that no information is omitted or forgotten. The overall answers from the survey are similar to the overall answers from the interviews. Even if not all respondents from the survey were interviewed, it can be considered that the same overall feelings were expressed by the respondents. This can be seen as a sign of honesty from the interviewees that seem to overall express the same ideas face to face than in the anonymous online survey.

4.6.2 Transferability

The second criterion discussed by Wallendorf & Belk (1989) is transferability. It refers to the possibility to apply the same research conclusion to a different context. One could ask “To what extent do these particular findings apply in another context or with other subjects?”. To do so, two of the methods that could be used are triangulation across sites or seeking limiting exceptions (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

With triangulation between sites, the researcher tries to apply the research findings in another location, different from the initial context in which the first research was conducted. Once this is done multiple times on different places, it offers a great opportunity for comparison to the researcher (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). By seeking limiting exceptions, the researcher expands the types of sites and contexts in which the phenomenon is being investigated. Little by little, the limits of the validity of the theory will appear. Finding the limits will also give the researcher an understanding of why the research findings do not apply in some instances. (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989)

The empirical research in this study was only conducted at one time and place but transferability is discussed as suggestions for future research in the last chapter of this thesis.

4.6.3 Dependability

When evaluating the dependability of his/her research, the research estimated how dependent his/her research results are to a certain time, place and context. Wallendorf & Belk (1989) explain that people and contexts constantly change which means that a researcher will never have the opportunity to conduct the exact same research again as the context and people will have changed. The authors also suggest that rather than trying to conduct the same research a few days or weeks later, the researcher should return after several months or years. That way, the change will be more visible, and he/she will in that way, get a better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

In this research, the answers from the respondents might differ, had this interview to be done again later in time. Indeed, most of the questions and answer were based on personal opinions, experiences and personal perceptions. As individuals collect more experiences, positive or negative, their answers will possibly differ. The question of gender is also becoming more and more common in organisations and in society. With the years, the perceptions might change and the results of a similar might be very different.

4.6.4 Confirmability

When assessing the confirmability of his/her research, the researcher tries to evaluate to which degree the findings have been influenced by the subject (the interviewee) and the researcher him/herself (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). Confirmability evaluates the possibility that the exact same conclusions and results would be found if another researcher for example was to conduct the study again. It relates to the ability of recreating and tracing the analysis and interpretation that was done of the collected data. An access to the raw data and to other records kept is an essential part of confirmability (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

In this research, the analysis method choice and the data analysis process are carefully described in this paper and the collected data, both through the electronic survey and the in-depth interviews are stored and available for later checks. The preliminary survey was conducted anonymously. This limits the possibility for the answers to be influenced by who the researcher is. The interviewees were also informed that their answers were going to be kept anonymous which also is an extra guarantee that the interviewer should not influence their answers. Finally, there was a good share between the interviewees that

were acquainted to the researcher and interviewees that had never met the interviewer previously.

4.6.5 Integrity

There can be integrity issues in a research when there appears a conflict between the researcher and the subject. In case if a conflict or of a lack of trust for instance, the data collected from the subject might be biased (subject bias). This could be done on purpose, if the respondent does not want to tell the truth to the researcher for some reason or unconsciously, if the respondent is for instance too shy to tell the truth or if the respondent is too uncomfortable in the situation of the research (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

In this study, the respondents to the survey and the interviewees were all informed if the anonymity of the research. Also, the interviews were either conducted face to face in a private room or through skype/phone as a one to one discussion. Therefore, the conditions were thought out to allow the respondents to feel as safe as possible to be open and honest about their opinions, experience and answers.

5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The two research questions in this study were:

- **How is leadership perceived by the members of a business university?**
- **How is that leadership gendered?**

The findings for the empirical research will be supported with quotes from the interviews. According to Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012), this allows a clearer and better structured presentation of the results. This chapter will discuss the empirical results collected from the interviews and the preliminary online survey. It will also offer a short analysis of the results. The findings will be connected to the existing literature. This chapter will be separated into four parts. The first theme that will be covered will be the construction of leadership and it will be followed by the themes of construction of men and women, construction of inequalities and finally construction of time.

Throughout this chapter, the results from the empirical research will be analysed together with the results collected from the preliminary online survey. As a reminder, the online survey collected a total of 41 responses from students and staff from the business university.

5.1 Construction of leadership

The first theme of this analysis is the construction of leadership. Understanding how the respondents construct their perception of leadership is a crucial step to understand what their perception is and to determine if that perception of leadership is gendered. Two main topics related to the construction of leadership that came up during the empirical research were the definition of leadership and how one becomes a leader.

5.1.1 Definition of leadership

The interviewees shared rather similar perceptions and definitions of leadership. The themes of unity, showing the example or the way, inspiring, were mentioned by several interviewees. Some, such as interviewees 3 and 4, focused more on skills and actions that are part of the role whereas others, such as interviewee 8, focused more on personality traits.

> Interviewee 3: “I would say showing the way, that's how I would define it”
>
> Interviewee 4: “I think a leader must be able to unite people in a way”
>
> Interviewee 8: “For me personally, a leader is somebody who has self-awareness, who is able to engage in reflexivity, has emotional intelligence and social intelligence, is able to listen. But also formulate his or her own opinions and push them through with action. So, a leader for me is somebody who I think is both ethically sound, is transparent and trustworthy. And know what they stand for and necessarily not somebody who doesn't make mistakes. I don't think that's a leader. I think a leader is somebody who's able to learn and share their experience, shows a learning process with the followers and the people around them.”

The words that were the most associated with the concept of leadership from the online survey were: people, listen, decisions, goal and inspire. This is consistent with the perception that the interviewees had of leadership as shown in the quotes above.

In the online survey, the respondents were also asked to give the three traits/characteristics that every leader should have. Some of the words were mentioned several times: “confidence” (mentioned 10 times), “skills”, “communication”, “compassion”, “determination”, “strong”, “charisma” or “humble”. The respondents seemed to value the balance between confidence and determination, and humbleness and compassion.

Overall, a lot of skills and personality traits were named as being necessary for a leader. The interviewees seem to agree on most of the skills. Looking at the answers collected during the research, it is obvious to notice that the vocabulary used when describing leadership skills or a so-called leadership personality trait, evolve around power, strength, ambition and determination. The word *strong* was mentioned by several of the interviewees, as well as the importance of teamwork and collaboration.

> Interviewee 1: “I think a leader should be someone who is able to coach in a way, but also to rule. So he has to be both understanding and engaging, but also at some point he has to be the boss ; “she or he has to be like really, really strong in defending the team.” ; “he needs to make tough decisions sometimes”
>
> Interviewee 2: “determined, inspiring and goal oriented.”
>
> Interviewee 3: “I think empathy is super important. Like being able to like identify like the strengths. [...] identifying weaknesses and then like offering like concrete kind of like guidance”
>
> Interviewee 4: “I do think that decision making capabilities are really important [...] So I think a leader must be brave as well to do, even if there is uncertainty, make decisions that are hard.” ; “I think if you can't communicate, you can't unite people. If you can't unite people, you can't be a leader”
>
> Interviewee 5: “if somebody is too overly [...] power hungry, it doesn't come across as very nice, it's not something I appreciate in a leader.”
>
> Interviewee 7: “I think to be a leader is definitely also to be a team player, but not to be, in any case, obedient. So, you still need to have a lot of confidence and a lot of, yeah, you must be secure

> in the way you kind of handle things. [...] Being humble also a little bit. Being humble, but also being strong [...] And I think a leader should be empathic."
>
> Interviewee 8: "Authenticity. Honesty, transparency. Trustworthiness, integrity."

The literature review discussed Spears' (2010) interpretation of a leader's characteristics. Spears (2010) names for instance empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building communities. This is similar to the definition given by the respondents both in the interviews and in the online survey.

The literature review also highlighted that different scholars give different definitions of what a leader's skills and traits should be. Türetgen et al. (2017) argues that all individuals make their own interpretation of what traits a leader should have. The similarity in the responses given in the empirical study however show a common understanding of what traits a leader should have. It could be argued that this common understanding is encouraged by the fact that all the interviewees and respondents come from the same business university and the same culture/environment, which could mean that this environment has influenced their perception.

5.1.2 Becoming a leader

When discussing their perception of leadership, the interviewees all developed how one becomes a leader. The interviewees mostly agreed that leaders are not born leaders, but that men and women become leaders through different experiences.

> Interviewee 3: "I don't think you're born with it, but I think it comes like it is quite based like on the like, on your natural like characteristics. I'm sure you can improve them to some extent. But I would feel that I would maybe say that it's something that is inherent as opposed to something that can be like learned from like zero."
>
> Interviewee 4: "I do think it's something you can learn. I do think that persons change. And that's why I also believe that people kind of become leaders."
>
> Interviewee 5: "Some basic traits make it easier. But then, of course, you also develop leadership skills, so I mean, it's not like or I don't believe anybody is a natural born leader. You have some traits that may be facilitated that maybe also influence your own willingness to be a leader, your own interest in it. But then I do think it's something you develop, and you can get better at."
>
> Interviewee 7: "I believe that some people are just born with these like traits or were raised in a way that they already embrace those traits. So, it's easier for them, maybe, but I'm pretty sure you can train. This is more about being self-reflective."

The interviewees seem to identify two paths to leadership: being born a leader and learning to be a leader. Both opinions came up in the interviews and the opinions were very different. Some interviewees, such as interviewee 7 above, believed that leaders can

be born with traits or characteristics that would facilitate their path to leadership but that ultimately, one can also train to become a leader.

This question is relevant in a context in which there is not an equal representation of men and women in leadership positions. Understanding how people become leaders will help understand how women become or not leaders.

In the previous sub-chapter, the respondents, and scholars (Spears, 2010) identified some leadership traits to be strength, confidence, and humbleness. It can therefore be argued if people that are born strong, confident, and humble are born leaders or if on the other hand, learning to be strong, confident, and humble makes someone a leader.

The topic of becoming a leader is closely linked to the definition people give of a leader and to what characteristics people associate with the position of leader. As Thompson & Pleck (1986) argued, some traits are perceived as being male or female traits. Strength or confidence being often perceived as a male trait for instance. This makes the question of becoming a leader a relevant focus when trying to determine of the perception of leadership of the interviewees is gendered, as it is the research question in this study.

5.1.3 Example of leaders

The interviewees gave several mentions of persons that they consider as being a good representation of a leader. The examples came sometimes from personal experiences but were also public personalities. All interviewees but one were able to very easily name someone that they consider as being leaders. It is interesting to note that the justifications given for each example of leader differ a lot. One interviewee highlighted how the leader they named was strong, with a lot of experience. Another one explained that it is the encouragements, the empowerment and the share of experiences that made the person a leader.

> Interviewee 1: “Angela Merkel and the reason that I think that she seems like a good leader or the image of a leader is because she's, you know, kind of like a really strong person, strong personality, of course, like, you know, experience kind of precedes her name.”
>
> Interviewee 2: “It is my boss. […] So, he basically is someone who leads the group of people, right, to maybe achieve a goal of maximizing the profit for the company. Something like that. And he inspired me a lot by encouraging me to do my good work to empower me in everything I do. And also, to give out you know like different lessons and experiences from his own point of view. That helps me to learn and be inspired.”
>
> Interviewee 4: “If you think about somebody like world leader or big front figure in the world. Then, of course, Nelson Mandela is, you know, personifies the good leader, the benevolent leader, the wise, the so on.”

> Interviewee 7: “I don't think that there so far any ultimate leader in my point of view”

In the online survey, Barack Obama was very widely the most quoted leader. His name came up 15 times when the interviewees were asked to name one person they consider as a leader. The respondents both named leaders that can be consider as public personalities (state leaders, multinational CEOs, etc.) and leaders that come from more personal experiences (bosses in a company, colleagues). Several state leaders were indeed mentioned: Barack Obama very widely but also Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron, Sauli Niinistö and Tarja Halonen.

It can also be noted that interviewee 1 for instance justifies that they perceive Angela Merkel as a leader because she is a strong person and has a strong personality. This same adjective of strong/strength was also used by scholars (Spears, 2010) and also appeared in the discussion of how one becomes a leader.

Further argumentation could be done when considering Eagly & Carli (2003) and Chapman’s (1975) argument that the perception society has of leader is based on male norms and that male are often preferred leaders because they are closer to the ideal leader image. As said, strength was one of the traits that was associated by Spears (2010) to men. Angela Merkel is however a woman but is perceived as a leader because of her strength, which is a male characteristic.

Türetgen et al. (2017) argued that people create in their minds, an image of what a leader should be. They identify certain characteristics or traits that they themselves believe a person should have to be a leader. It is thus relevant to question one’s perception of themselves to see if the perception and the expectations the individuals have for themselves is similar to the ones they have for leaders.

During the interviews, the interviewees were also asked if they perceived themselves as leaders and if so, in what situation. If naming other leaders seemed easy, the interviewees seemed to find it challenging to describe themselves as leaders.

> Interviewee 1: “I think sometimes self-confidence, you know, like I'm too aware of my own limitations”

> Interviewee 2: “I would say occasionally because in some of the group works I do; I do see myself take the leads. I do see myself encourage my teammates to do their best work to compliment them appropriately and to point out which they could improve personally so that they can make their work better.”

> Interviewee 3: “I feel like at the moment in my work environment, there's no real space for me to take a leadership role”

> Interviewee 4: “So I think I personally I have been a leader for the last five years. […] I've always been maybe sometimes too quick in making decisions. […] I actually have some experience from leading people. I do have bad, bad experiences from being a leader as well. So, I wouldn't say that anyone is perfect. But then again, I'm a leader […] I realized I had experiences where I tried to lead people that didn't work. So, yeah, but I do. I do think that I'm a leader for myself at least.”

The same patterns could be observed from the online survey. There was almost an equal number of respondents that considers themselves as leaders and that did not consider themselves as leaders. The reasons for not considering themselves as leaders were for example the lack of opportunities or situations where one could take the lead, one other consider themselves as too insecure and not likeable enough and a few others said that they could act as a leader if needed but that it was not part of their true personality.

5.2 Construction of men and women

5.2.1 Difference between men and women leaders

If gender was completely left out from the definition of leadership given by the interviewees earlier, it was however discussed extensively when the topic of differences between men and women leaders came up. Interestingly, when asked what, if any, differences existed between men leader and women leaders, the focus of the interviewees stayed on how gender influenced people’s expectations of the leader’s performance. Interviewee 3 and 7 both mentioned the term of “female/woman leader” being used whereas the term “male/man leader” is not often heard. The interviewees also mention a hierarchy of genders in leadership. Interviewee 2 argues for instance that the male opinion is more respected than the female one.

> Interviewee 2: “So basically we post the same opinions but the one that the male gender post is more respects respected than the female.”

> Interviewee 3: […] man leader would for me, have a negative connotation […] I just think both man leader and woman leader or female leader or male leader, both has kind of like a negative connotation to me because I also think it shouldn't matter at all what, what gender you are.”

> Interviewee 7: “So, a man leader is just a leader. A woman leader is OH! a female leader. So, everyone is watching her. Everyone is expecting her to kind of bring something new, bring something good. I don't know, to prove that a woman can do this job, which basically means that if she manages to keep the company alive and just keep it the same way, then it was people will say, OK, but what did you achieve? Whereas if it would have been a man, no one would have kind of talked about. It's just like another leader that maybe didn't do something great. But the company was running. Everything was fine.”

The interviewees however did also find some characteristics specific for men leaders. Strength was mentioned as well as a deeper voice and stability. The (positive and negative) impact of the tone of the voice on the perception of a leader was also discussed by Berkowitz et al. (2010). They argued that some feminine traits such as a high-pitched

voice might make some people seem unfit for the role of leader because the ideal image of a leader is based on male norms.

> Interviewee 4: “the man would probably have a much deeper voice. Which life do humans somehow are is comfortable and easier, not easier to connect to, but it gives a comfort and a sense of stability.”

> Interviewee 5: “I think more commonly men are perceived as strong leaders. And this is now not my view. I'm just saying what I think is if I mean, more often men are viewed as strong leaders, more men are leaders. Take the corporate world. Men are seen as more suitable leaders, perhaps. Same goes for politics. […] There is a bias towards viewing men as strong or good leaders, which is not, of course, necessarily the case. Men have just had more opportunities.”

Interestingly, strength was also mentioned for female leaders. This could confirm some of the arguments from Eddy (2009) and Mavin & Grandy (2012). All three argue that leadership is based on a male role and that in order to be successful, female leaders have to take on “male-like” characteristics in order to be successful. Strength is one of the characteristics that is mentioned.

> Interviewee 1: “I actually have like I have more female bosses than maybe bosses in my career. I mean, they were very generally very strong women”

Some of the other traits mentioned for the female leaders included a “motherly role”, women taking less risks or better empathy. Van Engen et al. (2010) and Chapman (1975) had argued that female leaders tended to be more relationship oriented than male leaders. Interviewee 8’s perception seems to align perfectly with their argument. Chapman (1975) had also argued that women tend to be more likely to work in groups, which also completes Interviewee 8’s comment.

> Interviewee 1: “I've maybe seen from the outside women who are leaders who maybe take, okay it kind of sounds bad, but like a motherly role or something more than men”

> Interviewee 1: “And then women will be in the more compassion side, maybe better coaches more. I don't know, better soft skills, you know, in a way like understanding”

> Interviewee 4: “I would say that women take less risk. They are more organized and better at communicating as well.”

> Interviewee 8: “I think women are more suited because I think women have on average, general life, of course, yeah, I think women have a greater tendency to empathize with others and take others into consideration.”

Loden (1985, in Eagly & Johnson, 1990) comes to the same conclusion by opposing male and female leaders on several characteristics. Men as leaders, would be characterised by traits such as controlling, unemotional, competitive and analytical problem solvers. Whereas women would be characterised as emotional, cooperative, low control and problem solving based on feelings and intuition (Loden 1985, in Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

One interviewee also seemed to identify a double standard in the expectations for men and women leaders. Interviewee 7 describes for example how it is acceptable and expected for women to put family as a priority whereas men usually do not share that, even if they have the same priority.

> Interviewee 7: "I never heard a guy say it like I just want to have children and be at home. And I think if a man would really say this, even if he wanted to. People would look down on him as well. So, I think there is a little bit this bias. A woman can say this woman can say, I want to have a husband, I want to be a stay at home mom and just be with my children. I have often never heard a man saying this"

5.2.2 Gender roles

The discrepancy in expectations for men and women leader could be summarised into gender roles. West & Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender roles are learned early in childhood and widely accepted by society. Lorber (1994) defined gender roles as the behaviours individuals are expected to have based on their gender. Several interviewees discussed the need for women in leadership roles to take on a male role and/or behaving like a man in order to be successful in their leadership position.

> Interviewee 8: "I've been in such different contexts, so when I worked in [...] a male dominated industry, there were women there for sure. They had to be very tough and adhere to male stereotypical norms"

> Interviewee 6: "But of course, I would know from my past history that behaving a certain way, like women would go to the top in IT, they often say that this is my worst self. And yet the best thing I can say to a woman is that she's one of the guys, she's up there [...] because she's like one of the guys."

> Interviewee 5: "women lead by taking on a very sort of male perceived role [...] It is very sort of hard and take care not to show feelings or emotions and to sort of this perception that, OK, if I'm going to lead, I need to be like one of the guys to be accepted as a leader. And you see that in a lot of women, too. Sometimes it works well. Sometimes it doesn't."

Both interviewee 5 and 7 seem to suggest that female traits can even be negative. Interviewee 5 argues that women leaders don't show feelings or emotions (traits widely attributed to women) in order to be "one of the guys" and successfully lead. Interviewee 7 goes even further by arguing how the saying doing something "like a girl" mean doing something poorly whereas doing something "like a guy" means doing something successfully.

> Interviewee 7: "we are raised with this kind of set in mind that we are basically raised with all these kinds of, OK. You run like a girl. That means you suck in running, whereas you run like a boy as a compliment."

Finally, interviewee 6 argued how women, per their gender, are expected by society to fill in a certain role. Women are not encouraged to prioritise themselves and their careers but rather their role of woman.

> Interviewee 6: “And also women, they have trouble telling their bosses, telling their colleagues, telling their spouses or whoever else. But like telling other people, I'm doing this now. I'm putting myself first. Then you just kind of dig yourself in the hole because your whole environment is used to you baking muffins every morning or even at work.”

This is another consequence of the difference of how having children impacts women and men differently. As it will be developed in sub chapter 5.3.2, women are often negatively impacted in their career when having children. This is not only due to the time that they will spend outside of working life when having a child. Women will also be more likely to stay home if the child is sick for instance.

Finally, the quote above also illustrates the finding from the World Economic Forum from 2018 that discusses the unequal share of unpaid work such as housework. In the 29 countries with data available, women spent on average 50% more time than men doing housework or unpaid work (WEF, 2018).

5.2.3 Gendering of professions

The under-representation of women in leadership positions can also be explained by so called gendered professions. As interviewee 3 explains, some professions are known to be widely occupied by women, such as teachers or nurses, which do not lead to leadership positions per se. However, an interesting specification made by interviewee 3 is that this is first and foremost a career choice, meaning that it is sometimes also women’s choice not to engage in careers with the aim to reach a leadership position in an organisation. Interviewee 6 also argues that men tend to go for finance or accounting careers, which both are traditional backgrounds for individuals in leadership positions.

> Interviewee 3: “More women become teachers than men. So, in that sense, you might like on the surface, you might say that, of course, it's their choice. And if you choose to become a teacher, then you will not become like the company leader.”

> Interviewee 4: “I think that like women in general are more in administrative stuff, like it doesn't matter where it is, it’s the trend.”

> Interviewee 6: “But you can see in finance and accounting that s where all the guys are, that's where the money is.”

Gender is thus also affecting the profession choices and the careers of men and women. Hoobler et al. (2011) argued that the under-representation of women in leadership are reinforcing the pattern of women not seeking leadership opportunities or seeking promotions. They argued that the lack of female representation in leadership positions negatively impact other women’s ambition.

5.3 Construction of inequalities

Inequalities were widely discussed during the empirical research, especially when discussing the negative consequences of gender on leadership. To understand and develop on the gendered perception of leadership, this chapter will discuss what difference and inequalities exist between men and women in a context of leadership in an organisational context.

As it was argued by Shastri (2014), a distinction needs to be made between inequality and discrimination, especially in a context of gender. “Gender discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of an individual or group due to gender” (Shastri, 2014). The European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender inequality as follows: “Legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles. ”

5.3.1 Discrimination of men and women

The interviewees argued that discrimination exists both towards men and women. These discussions started in most cases after addressing the under-representation of women in leadership positions. Quotas were mentioned as a common way for companies to address an unequal representation of women in some teams/industries. They were however also seen as discriminating men in favour of women as interviewee 1 explained.

> Interviewee 1: “I felt it myself, you know, in certain companies of, they kind of promote or, you know, because they're always choosing a woman to fill the quotas. […] So I think it could be really bad because people could react to it [quotas] very negatively.”

> Interviewee 1: “I don't know how real it was, but I felt that it was hard, like, it would have been easier if I would have been a woman to progress in the company.”

Interviewee 4 also told that he was working in an environment where 90% of the staff is made of women and that due to him being a man, he was in charge of all physical work. On top of being an example of how men can be discriminated, it is also a good example of gender role as in this situation, there was a common understanding that because the interviewee 1 is a man, he must be strong. This is similar to Berkowitz et al.’s (2010) argument that strength would be a masculine trait.

> Interviewee 4: “I do have to carry most heavy stuff here. I thought maybe because they assume that I'm stronger than the women would be. But then again, is it true or not then. Well I would say yes, it's true.”

The interviewees also discussed what discrimination women experience. The quotas mentioned above as being discriminating to men can also be seen as discriminating to women:

> Interviewee 1: “they're desperate to hire ANY women regardless of capabilities sometimes.”

Women could thus be perceived as getting the opportunity, not based on capabilities but only based on their gender, which could cause negative perceptions both from other but also from themselves. An interesting other example was given by interviewee 3, in a Finnish context. Business meeting being held in saunas (which are traditionally separate between men and women) between men (as being leadership groups often are widely composed of men) do not include women in discussions and sometimes decision-making.

> Interviewee 3: “like in Finland, I guess that's been a quite long tradition of like having some kind of like business meetings in like saunas, for example, which is like super, of course, like not very intrusive.”

A third inequality that was mentioned was the perception of women. Interviewee 4 argued that women must work harder in order to give an impression that is as strong as a man. This suggests that women are from the start not put on the same level as men in people’s perception and this discrimination is therefore affecting them negatively. This is similar to one of Eagly & Carly’s (2003) argument that writes that women would be held to a higher standard of competencies that men due to doubts in their abilities.

> Interviewee 4: “Women would have to work and not work much harder, but really like they are much more difficult time to give an impression that is maybe as strong as a man.”

This last point matches with some of the arguments brought up in the literature review. Eddy & Cox (2008) argue that women in leadership positions can suffer from stereotypes such as women are too sensitive, not strong and directive enough to be good leaders. They also found that women leaders therefore tend to develop masculine traits, that are more socially accepted for a leader (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

5.3.2 Maternity

Hoobler et al. (2011) argue for instance that the main cause of the lack of advancement in women’s careers nowadays is the family-work conflict. This includes marriage, children or plans of having children. Maternity leave can have a great impact on women’s careers. As interviewee 1 argues, age is a strong factor that pressures women to have kids and therefore take maternity leave.

> Interviewee 1: “I think a woman needs to kind of have their life together if she wants to have a family, of course, and this is the choice of does she want to have a family or not, but most people do., if you are 35, [...] kind of like the clock's ticking. Biologically while for a man, of course it ticks, but it's not as hardcore.”

Interestingly, several of the interviewees discuss the choice of “family or career”, suggesting perhaps that the two are not compatible.

> Interviewee 8: “I know a lot of females who don't want those senior positions because they demand, you know, a lot of time and a lot of effort. And if you have a family, even if you live in a Nordic country, who is you're still doing a lot of extra work at home. So it's also a value based judgment for many women that, you know, I can if I want to be a good parent, I can be the senior manager unless I have somebody at home taking care of everything else.”

> Interviewee 7: “So I think like in leadership, there is gender inequality. But it's not only related to the companies or these like silent rules, but it's more to the whole society or what we perceive, because if a computer calculates rationally that the man is the better solution, mainly because the woman goes on pregnancy leave or maternity leave, then there is a problem in the society and not directly related in the business is still that the woman stays at home even if they are a couple.”

Eagly & Carli (2007) and Auspurg et al. (2017) also discussed the work-life balance for women and the fact that there tends to be an unequal share of unpaid between men and women tasks such as childcare or household chores. Lips (2012) adds that this unequal share of housework encourages some women to work only part-time or to be full-time housewives. This is in line with interviewee 7 and 8’s arguments that women sometimes need to choose between work and home.

Interviewee 3 and 8 also discuss the opportunities that company have to set up better structures in order to facilitate maternity leaves and limit the impact on the organisation and on the careers of women.

> Interviewee 3: “I guess like pregnancy is like one very big topic. Like it's just a fact that if a woman wants to have children, then she's going to be out of the workforce for quite a long time. And I like do understand that that can be like a financial burden for a company. But I feel like companies like should put in place like structures which actually like encourage pregnancy, for example, as well. I like don't like punish it.”

> Interviewee 8: “I see that there are steps being taken such as, you know, more flexible work arrangements and understanding of work life balance with family leave these things.”

Hoobler et al. (2011) have also argued that managers, regardless of their gender, tend to use family-work balance as a cause for lower performance of female employees. Interviewee 8 mentions the burnout that some women might experience trying to find a work-life balance.

> Interviewee 8: “This is mostly because of career ambitions. So when you look at those statistics, it doesn't say that women don't have career ambition. It's just that to manage them, we have we have to be realistic. And I think that's also why we see so much burnout and stress more a lot of women, because we're supposed to handle it all.”

Maternity as part of women's lives is therefore seen by many as an inequality. Women might face negative experiences based on societal expectations or career stereotypes such as choosing between having a career or a family.

The fact that that maternity can negatively impact the careers of women brings organisations at the center of the problem. Hoobler et al. (2011) were for instance arguing that the expectations companies have for the ideal worker are not compatible with the responsibilities a mother would have. They pictured the ideal worker as being able to work flexible hours, be able to work overtime when needed and be able to prioritise work. The fact that these expectations are often not compatible with the responsibilities of mothers explain according to Hoobler et al. (2011) the inequalities between men and women at the workplace.

Maternity is here proven to be one of the biggest causes of why and how gender influences leadership in an organisational context.

In 2018, the OECD published a report of Parental Leave Systems for countries across OECD countries and EU countries. The report found that on average, the length of maternity leave in those countries were 18 weeks long and generally paid. On average, paternity leave in those countries are only eight weeks long. Some of the countries however offer the option to split the total "parental leave" between the mother and the father. (OECD, 2018). In Finland, where this research is conducted, paid maternity lasts a total of maximum 15 weeks and paid paternity leave lasts a maximum of nine weeks (KELA, 2019).

It is a common pattern that paternity leave is shorter than maternity leave. Paternity leave was not mentioned wither during the interviews. This also shows that women are seen as being the primary responsible of the child and they stay away from work for longer than the father. Further research could focus on studying the impact a longer paternity leave could have on the inequalities that maternity creates on women's career progression.

5.3.3 Reproduction of patterns

Men and women reproducing career paths patterns to younger generations was another example of how gender could create inequalities in a context of career growth and leadership.

During the empirical research, the interviewees mentioned inequalities that happened between senior and junior staff. Senior staff would prefer hiring/coaching/mentoring junior staff that are of the same gender as themselves, discriminating others simply based on their gender. The interviewees discussed a reproduction of patterns and a potential wish from the senior staff to find someone similar to themselves or even a younger version of themselves and to help juniors. Interviewee 4 shared his experience with a female recruiter at a job interview. He reported that he got a cold and seemingly uninterested response from the recruiter potentially because he was a man and the company was mostly made of women.

> Interviewee 4: "I went to this one job interview and I was interviewed by women. And she in fact, I knew that like the office she was working at was like 100 percent women working that as well. I think I thought that the interview was very, very, let's say, extremely neutral. There was no like joy or no, no nothing. It was really like all flat. No, no emotions in any direction. And just like flat, I would say monotonous and unsolicited, like she was not interested in hiring me from the time or the second I stepped in the door."

Interviewee 5 used the word "crown prince" when describing the phenomenon of senior staff looking for a younger version of themselves to support and mentor.

> Interviewee 5: "If you have all male leaders it's not unlikely that these sort of people are like this, [...] they can focus on a younger person coming up who is similar to them, and they see themselves like, well, that that person is like me when I was younger. [...] That you sort of if you're an older senior man in a powerful position, you might sort of look for your crown prince and identify someone who's sort of similar to what you were. And then it's more likely that men will identify men, women, maybe women."

Interviewee 7 shared her personal experience of preferring to go to her female mentor rather than to her male boss with some of her issues or concern, simply because her male boss would not understand some of the struggles she has. This also brings up the question of men and women not facing the same challenges or struggles in work life.

> Interviewee 7: "And I actually sometimes it's easier to identify yourself with a woman. So there are things that I would talk with my mentor about, that I would not with my boss, because I 100% know that he cannot understand this struggle simply because he is not a woman."

Interviewee 8 also discussed a reproduction of patterns from senior to junior staff. She however adds that given the over-representation of male in senior positions; the mentoring often happens for males than for females.

> Interviewee 8: "I think that males have sometimes better support role models from senior males. That's not the case for us females. So there is still this kind of male network of helping those that are very much like yourself. And so, of course, if you're a guy, those most like yourself, you can see yourself in this more junior academics. So I see a lot of this mentoring that's happening according to gender, but more for male than female."

5.4 Construction of context

The final theme that was discussed in the empirical research was the importance of context. When discussing and describing their perception of leadership and of gender and leadership, the interviewees presented a sense of evolution, time and also described the importance of the environment and of context on their perception.

5.4.1 Culture

Culture and the environmental context were often mentioned during the interviews. Perceptions are known to be influenced by the environment which makes culture a relevant matter when studying the perception of leadership. The context of this research is a business university in Finland. All the interviewees either work or study at same business university. Finland has for many years ranked highest on the list of countries with the lowest pay gap in the world as the World Economic Forum's report in 2018 presented. (WEF, 2018) This was mentioned for instance by interviewee number 2 and interviewee number 8.

> Interviewee 2: "Probably also because this is a Nordic business school where they kind of cherish the gender equality."
>
> Interviewee 7: "I think in Finland you have quite good gender equality at least."
>
> Interviewee 8: "in Finland, we're very blessed to have a very developed social welfare policy in terms of parental leave. So for sure, this this this this has come a long way."

The interviewees thus acknowledge the privilege that Finland offers in comparison to other countries. Interviewee 7 for example discussed the situation for women and companies in Russia in regard to maternity leave practices.

> Interviewee 7: "if you look at a country like Russia, the woman goes on maternity leave for three years. So I partly even understand that for a company that is super tricky."

Finally, at the time of the empirical study, Finland had just set a government led by five women. This was brought up by interviewee 8 that asked the question if having a government led by women would make a difference in regard to the situation of gender equality in Finland.

> Interviewee 8: "looking at the political situation at the moment in Finland, it will be interesting to see. You know whether five women in the coalition will be different or whether that is whether they're still ingrained in the context that it will just be the same stuff another day."

The interviewees were thus well aware of the privileged situation Finland has when it comes to gender equality and equal pay. It also became clear that they were taking the

context of the country they live in into consideration when discussing leadership and gender equality.

5.4.2 Generations

The perception of leadership and overall societal expectations and practices seem to be heavily affected by generations. Just as mentioned before with the reproduction of patterns between senior and junior staff, there can be a gap between generations regarding the perception of leadership and of gender and leadership.

The interviewees seem to perceive an evolution in the gender inequalities and in the under-representation of women in leadership positions. The interviewees suggested that the gender inequalities are more important among older generations and that millennials or younger generations do not care about gender differences as much. As interviewee 7 suggests, there is a better gender equality among millennials as more women from that generation are already reaching leadership position.

> Interviewee 7: “I think generation Y might be a little bit more equal because millennials are such a big generation span. So we are or I am kind of at the end of the millennials, but it's like a super big span and some are already approaching these leadership position. But we see it already. Women get pregnant later in life.”

Interviewee 1 however emphasises that this change towards a more gender equal representation of women in leadership positions will take time and it is only with newer generations coming and older generations retiring that we will see a change. He also argues that it is not through people from a same generation getting promoted to leadership positions that the change will be made as women from lower positions cannot simply move up to leadership roles.

> Interviewee 1:” So if you go to like younger generations, that equality or like the numbers are quite more normal, more what they should be. But of course, in the more senior positions, yes. Like there was no time to you know, suddenly you can have every woman who has been, you know, in a secretary position to be suddenly like a business manager. And I think we need to wait quite a few years to see what's the actual situation.”

Interviewee 6 finally argues that younger generations do not seem to care about gender as much as the older generations but that some gendered stereotype still remain such as gendered professions, such as nursing for women and maths for men.

> Interviewee 6: “I think there's a generational shift. Younger people don't seem to care. You know, about gender, about nationality, age that much. They don't see it to be that much into that anymore. But of course, math is more a skill for boys and the nursing, and all this is still for girls. I don't know.”

5.4.3 Future

There seems to also have been an evolution in people's perception of leadership. The common understanding of what or who a leader is has evolved. As interviewee 8 argues, in the past, the stereotypical leader could have been described as a white male. Even if some women also have been leaders, they have not stayed in history.

> Interviewee 8: "What we see in mainstream society today. But if you look historically, there's different types of leaders. So really, you know, there's been a lot of societies that have been led by women that don't enter into the mainstream discourse on what a leader is. So the way that we see a leader today in the western world where we're situated is very traditionally a white male."

Interviewee 8 also explains how the perception or expectation society had for leaders was very strict.

> Interviewee 8: "before I would say that, you know, the kind of traditional aspect of what we see as a corporate leader was very strict. You know, you're a tall white man who had education. So, it was a very conformed understanding."

Literature overall argues that leadership is based on male norms and that in order to be perceived as a leader and in order to be a successful leader, a female should adopt male characteristics as it is the common image of the ideal leader. This was argued by Ely (1995) and Eagly & Carli (2003).

However, more recent studies such as Mavin & Grandy's (2012) argue that in order to be successful, a female leader has to act with a behaviour made both of masculinities and femininities. The ideal leadership behaviour would thus combine of inspirational motivation (masculinity) and of mentoring and nurturing (femininities) (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). In 2019, Zenger & Folkman also published a research that concluded that women rated higher on leadership capabilities than men.

In the future, this initial understanding of the ideal leader could be challenged and become more flexible. Almost all interviewees agreed that we are today going towards a more gender equal society and that leadership was slowly becoming less gendered. Leadership in the future would be seen as separate from any gender considerations.

> Interviewee 3: "I'm sure like we're getting closer to an environment where there's like really like equal opportunities."

> Interviewee 4: "I wouldn't say that the picture of leadership is going to change. Think leadership is leadership and it's going to stay like leadership. But I think that maybe people just realize that it's not subject to gender."

Interviewee 8 argues that the image we have of leaders today is different as previously because it is evolving with the societal understanding of our common values. Therefore,

some of the people that we today as a society consider as leaders have a very different profile than the earlier stereotypical ideal leader.

> Interviewee 8: “And now we have individuals that are coming in the leadership and really inspiring other people such as Greta Thunberg. You know, for example, you take 20 years ago even it would have, you know, for her to be the leader that she is with the diverse aspects of being a young female who has Asperger's. This was what would have been unheard of. So, I think that leadership goes very hand-in-hand also with the societal understanding of the values that we espouse. So, a leader is not just a vacuum. Well, a leader is made through the societal understanding of what we have and what we tried to aspire to.”

5.4.4 The business university

The interviewees all study or work at the same business university. They were either students, part of the administration staff or part of the academic staff. During the interview, they were questioned on their perception of the university overall but also as a gender equal institution.

The overall experience of the interviewees was very positive.

> Interviewee 2: “It has been pretty positive. […] So I feel like I'm part of the university. I really feel that .”

> Interviewee 7: “I'm super satisfied with [the business university]. It's a really great experience. The people, the faculty like there is really nothing that I could kind of complain of.”

When questioned on the business university as a gender equal institution, the interviewees mentioned some inequalities that they have noticed. For instance, they mentioned the under-representation or the over-representation of women in certain fields or departments. Interviewee 4 argued for example that 90% of the administrative staff in the institution were female whereas others regretted that women were over-represented in administration but under-represented in academia and among professors.

> Interviewee 4: “But literally, it's like I think more than 90 percent of female staff.”

> Interviewee 8: “So looking at well, what are the you know, are the more junior like assistant professors or associate professors, they are mostly female. And then we have males as professors. That's an interesting point. But if you look overall in academia, within business and management, you would see that there are much more male professors than female professors.”

The efforts made by the institution regarding gender equality or leadership were also negatively perceived. It was acknowledged that the business university does make some effort in regard to gender equality and that the business university is aware of the importance of gender equality.

> Interviewee 5: “I think [the business university] is explicitly sort of they're consciously working against these kinds opportunities. So I would say [the business university]as a school is very aware of this and sort of actively taking a stand”

However, the efforts were perceived as forced and focused on the external image such actions would give to the institution.

> Interviewee 1: “I think they overdo it, or they are with the trend of the super gender equality, which sometimes gets to be a bit ridiculous”

> Interviewee 6: “I think it has a lot to do with the position [the business university] has, like the only independent business school in Finland with the cultural traditions. There's a lot of strong ties to the business community. So, there's a lot to conserve. One has to be careful. One has to be careful on the image. One has to be a bit conservative. And that's create a special culture inside that the same prevails.”

> Interviewee 6: “the leadership is going that way: that we get the accreditations, we tried to look good. You know, it's a beauty contest on the outside and you don't care of really what's happening inside.”

The institution has today a female rector. This was positively seen by the interviewees, who perceived this as a positive thing when discussing the gender equality of the institution.

> Interviewee 2: “I do feel that as you can see the members of the board in the school: Karen Spencer. She's a female leader and alongside for example there's a professor in marketing track.”

If several interviewees praised the institution for having a female rector, many also believed that the business university was not completely gender equal.

> Interviewee 8: “I'm very happy to see that the top role is filled by a woman. But again, I'm looking at the feminine masculine values, not necessarily whether the individuals are of one gender or another. You look at I don't I don't actually know what the percentage of a professor like full professors are at the moment [the business university], but. It used to be much larger in terms of full professors being male and that I don't know how it is today.”

> Interviewee 5: “I mean, now it's like, for instance, a third female director in a row. Right. So things like this are working. So. So that's one thing. But then if we look at. If we look at, for instance, the structure of leadership in different departments, I think. Thinking about, for instance, professors and I guess the majority of professors are still male in some areas.”

> Interviewee 6: “Usually women have time later in the 40s and when children are a bit older. So, it requires that masculine expectations to work like crazy to publish in quantity, its s this very male valued place.”

> Interviewee 8: “So looking at well, what are the you know, are the more junior like assistant professors or associate professors, are they mostly female? And then we have males as professors? That's an interesting point. But if you look overall in academia, within business and management, you would see that there are much more male professors than female professors. So this is something.”

There thus seems to be a difference between what is perceived and what is experienced. The first impression that the interviewees shared of the business university was very positive. They were very happy that the rector was a woman and had overall a positive personal experience of working or studying at the business university.

Overall, they agree that the school gives the image of a gender equal institution but that the inequalities become visible when looking closer at the hierarchy of the school. Namely that even if a lot of women do work at the school, most of them hold positions that are lower on the hierarchy scale and that most of the professors still are men.

The efforts made by the school were also seen as forced and seen as being too-much.

6 DISCUSSION

This final chapter integrates the findings from the empirical research to the existing literature on gender and leadership. The chapter is concluded by managerial and practical implications and suggestions for further research.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The study combines existing literature on gender and leadership and the empirical study conducted within a business university. The perception of leadership of members of a business university has not been researched previously yet it is a relevant setting when discussing leadership in an organisational context. The perception students and staff have of leadership and if that leadership is gendered will affect both students and organisations in the future.

The aim of the empirical study was to understand how the members of the business university perceive leadership and how that leadership is gendered. The members of the business university include students but also academic and administrative staff.

The two research questions that were formulated are:

- How is leadership perceived by the members of a business university?

- How is that leadership gendered?

Based on the empirical evidence, it can be argued that there is a difference between how the members of the business university perceive the social construct that leadership is and how they personally experience leadership. The social construct of leadership has based the role of leader on male norms. This gives gender a central role and strong impact on the perception of leadership. The members of the business university have shown good awareness of leadership as a social construct and showed that they have internalised some of the norms and expectations that this social construct has taught them. The empirical study revealed that their perception of leadership has been influenced by the same gender processes and stereotypes associated with the role of leader that are described in previous literature. The members of the university find the under-representation of women in leading positions to be a central issue when associating gender with leadership. They show however that their personal experiences go against the gender stereotypes that they had internalised.

Based on empirical evidence, there is a difference between what the members of the university describe as an ideal leader and what they have experienced as being a good leader. Their perception of leadership is gendered but the social construct of leadership seems to have impacted that perception to a fair extent.

The theoretical importance of the findings on each of the two research questions are discussed next.

6.1.1 Perception of leadership: a social construct

The study showed a common understanding of leadership between the members of the business university. This understanding is very similar to the definition and description that previous studies have shown. The similarity in perception and understanding of leadership highlights that leadership is a social construct. Social constructionism suggests that meaning and knowledge are socially created (Andrews, 2012). Knowledge is defined as a set of beliefs that individuals have confidence in (Andrews, 2012) and meaning is being discussed as a taken for granted reality that people agree and believe in (Andrews, 2012; Young & Collin, 2004; Berkowitz et al., 2010).

Previous literature and the empirical study show that two different perceptions of leaders exist. The first perception is leadership as a formal hierarchical position and the second one is leadership as a set of traits and skills. The question raised by previous literature has been to understand what makes a person a leader. If it is because that person is formally or officially named leader through a position in an organisation or in society, or is a person perceived as a leader because he/she has the skills and traits that people associate with leadership.

The study found that the members of the business university have a common understanding of what skills and traits they would associate with leadership. Several traits were seen as essential for a leader namely confidence, decision making capabilities, communication skills, honesty, transparency, humbleness, strength and determination. These traits are consistent with Spear's (2010) interpretation of a leader's characteristics.

From the study, it can be argued that the members of the university associate leadership with a set of skills and traits. For them, having the right skills and traits is a very important part of who a leader is. They also all agree that one is not born a leader but rather can train and develop towards being a leader even if some natural capabilities or skills could make it easier for some. Not only do they have a clear and common

understanding of the traits they associate with leadership, those traits seem to be at the core of their perception of leadership. This perception is similar to Türetgen et al.'s (2017) view that leaders are being created in society and even within organisations (Türetgen et al., 2017). It is admitted in literature that a leader is very much separate from the hierarchy as leaders can be found in all levels in an organisation or in society (Emrich., 1999; Türetgen et al., 2017).

The study also found that when asked to give an example of a leader, the members of the business university mostly named presidents or heads of states, such as Barack Obama, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron or CEOs such as Steve Jobs for instance. If their initial perception and definition of a leader was more focused on a set of skills and traits, the study shows that the position and the formal role of a person still matters in their own perception of leaders. These examples show that the member of the business university to some extent associate leaders to power. This view can also be found in previous research. The responsibility of power that leaders are given as part of their role has been developed in the past (Hersey et al., 1979).

Even if some authors stress that leadership can be found in all levels of the hierarchy in organisations and in society (Türetgen et al., 2017), the importance of a formal role is present. One of the most common definition of leadership is "a process of social influence, which maximises the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal." (Forbes, 2013). From the literature's perspective, leadership is thus associated with a role of social influencer rather than a hierarchical position and the skills and traits are not brought up at the forefront of the definition of leadership/ leaders.

The study showed that when talking about themselves as leaders, the members of the business university showed again that the formal "role" of leader had a big importance in their perception of leadership. Some did not consider themselves as a leader because they had not been put in a leadership position of that they had not been in a position where they could have that role. It is however widely argued in literature that a leadership is distinct from the hierarchy and that leaders can be found in all levels in an organisation or in society (Emrich., 1999; Türetgen et al., 2017).

According to previous research and literature, the ideal leader is very strongly based on male norms and men would be perceived as being the ideal leaders. The concept of an "ideal leader" was brought up by Hoobler et al. (2011) and developed by Eagly & Carli

(2003). Berkowitz et al. (2010) and Hoobler et al. (2011) also argued that women are seen as unfit to be leaders because of their feminine attributes.

The empirical research showed that the members of the university to some extent seem to have a similar vision of their ideal leader. They named male CEOs and male heads of state as examples of leaders. However it is worth to recognise the emergence of a new type of leader. The members gave the example of Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenager activist for climate. As they admitted, she is far from being the typical leader and does not fit the "ideal leader" role described by Hoobler et al. (2011) but there was no doubt that she also would be considered being a leader.

6.1.2 Gendered perception of leadership

Türetgen et al. (2017) argued that people create in their minds, an image of what a leader should be. They identify certain characteristics or traits that they themselves believe a person should have to be a leader. And once they meet a person with those traits or characteristics, they will most likely categorise him or her as a leader. The empirical study found that the members of the business indeed have a vision of what a leader should be and that that vision also is to some extent based on male norms. However, the study also found that they were able to think outside the box and name a leader that did not fit the initial description of their ideal leader, that was closer to be affected by the male norms discussed in literature. The weight and impact of the male norms on which leadership is built on seem stronger in literature than in the perception of the members of the university. Berkowitz et al. (2010) and Hoobler et al. (2011) conclude that women are seen as unfit to be leaders mostly because of their feminine attitude and attributes. Eagly & Carli (2003) argue similarly as they found that the perception of leaders is often based on male norms and society therefore gives men the advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Chapman, 1975).

The study showed that there is a difference between what the members of the business university perceive as being the reality/the situation in the society they live in and their personal experience of leadership. When describing their perception of an ideal leader, the members of the university gave a definition of leaders and leadership that was very close to the definition given by literature. Namely that leadership was based on male norms (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Chapman, 1975) and that for example strength and confidence are the most important traits for a leader even though according to Eagly & Carli (2003) and Chapman (1975) those are masculine traits.

However, their personal experiences have been more positive with women leaders as they were more motivating, encouraging and emphatic. This would contradict their initial perception that the ideal leader would to some extent be a man. Eagly (2007) had also concluded that some feminine traits such as sensitivity, attention to detail or empathy have shown to be of great need in leadership positions. Most of the authors however argue that women will have difficulties to be accepted as leaders. Eddy (2009) argues that in order to be accepted and perceived as leaders, women need to bend and follow the men norms of leadership. Eddy & Cox (2008) also argued that women leaders develop masculine traits, that are more socially accepted for a leader.

There is a difference between what the members of the university describe as an ideal leader and what they have experienced as being a good leader. As the study showed, their personal experience with women leader has been often more positive than with men leaders. The members of the business university however used the pronoun he/him when giving generic examples of leaders and also quoted some traits commonly associated to men when describing the traits, the ideal leader should have. This would confirm Eagly & Carli's (2003) argument that the common understanding of the ideal leader is based on male norms and that therefore, people tend to prefer male leaders.

The empirical research showed that when talking about their own university, the members however criticised the fact that most professors were men. Even if the ideal leader would be based on male norms and even if when asked what they see as the ideal leader, the members still named men characteristics, it was here seen as a negative thing that the school has mostly men professors. Also, even if the perception of the ideal manager is male, the members of the university have a more positive perception of the female leader of the business university. This highlights that the members of the business university negatively perceive the unequal representation of genders in leadership positions.

The empirical research found that the members of the business university were aware of several gendered inequalities in an organisational setting, both from hearing about them and experiencing them themselves. The study found that the members of the university believe that the expectation for women to care for children or house task, impacts women negatively in their career progression.

Maternity and pregnancy are perceived by the members of the university as two of the biggest causes for inequalities between men and women in organisations. Women on

maternity leaves will eventually collect less months/years of work experience than men (as paternity leave is shorter or none). The members argued that women will also be in charge of extra responsibilities at home and will stay home from work for the sick children, which resonates with Auspurg's (2017) theory. Auspurg et al. (2017) argued that women were more likely to be in charge of house responsibilities which would therefore restrict their time to work. The study also found that the members believe that women miss work opportunities because an employer might consider a young woman as a potential future mother that will thus have to be out of work for some time. This resonates with the findings by Eagly & Carli (2007) that researched inequalities in the work/ life balance or the unequal representation of women in leadership positions. Eagly & Carli (2007) concluded that that individuals in an organisation tend to prefer male leaders, arguing that this relates to men being closer to the men norms that the ideal leader is based on.

The members of the business university are aware that in the current context, maternity and pregnancies do negatively impact women in their career progression. Similarly, Hoobler et al. (2011) discussed how the traditional model of the "ideal worker" involves expectations are often incompatible with the responsibilities of a mother for instance and therefore explain the inequalities growing between men and women at the workplace. The perception of the members is also similar to Venable's (2002) argument about the career progression differences between men and women. As women get children, they will take maternity leaves, which will constitute a break in their career. And because this break will be more important than the paternity leave that the father can take, women suffer from going back and forth from the job market (Venable, 2002).

Likewise, the members of the business university mentioned inequalities in society, such as meetings in saunas that directly exclude one gender from discussions but also personal experiences, where some felt that they had been discriminated because of their gender.

Eddy & Cox (2008) suggested that gendered processes become especially visible in organisations and that gendered decisions are made consciously or unconsciously that will affect individuals in recruitment or pay for example. The study shows that the members of the business university share a similar vision as they perceive organisations to have a key role in the fight against gender inequalities. The inequalities experienced by women due to the fact that the image of the ideal leader or the ideal manager in an organisation is a man (Hoobler et al., 2011) could be reduced by organisations

themselves. The members of the university suggested several ideas such as more flexible working hours that would be compatible with the extra responsibilities of a mother and a more equal pay system that would help reduce the gender pay gap.

The under-representation of women was found to be perceived negatively by the members of the business university. They criticised that almost all professors were men in their university. This resonates with Acker (1990) who discussed how the "all-male" representations of upper managements and boards affected women and made women seem unfit or un-welcomed to join such a group. Similarly, Fernandez-Mateo & Fernandez (2015) found that female managers were less likely than male managers to apply for management jobs and that often the reason given is the fear or expectation of being discriminated against men in leading positions. The study also found that the members of the university believe in a reproduction of patterns. They believe that people in upper management were likely to want to hire similar persons to themselves and because most leading staff is male, this would be one cause of the under-representation of women in leading positions. According to literature however, there is not one but several reasons to explain the under-representation of women in leadership. The theory of labyrinth of leadership discussed by several scholars (Eagly and Carly, 2007; McDonagh, 2012) argues that women, more than men need to go through several challenges in order to get to leadership positions. They believe that there is not one single reason that explain the reason of this difference in experience of both gender but that it is an accumulation of small incidents that explain the under-representation of women at the top (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

6.2 Managerial and practical implications

The managerial implications in the gendered perception people have of leadership and in the inequalities and discrimination experienced by some men and women has been shown in this research to be of great importance. As this study was conducted in an organisational context, the role of organisations was perceived as crucial in the fight against gender inequalities. As a reminder, gendered processes are processes that puts a hierarchy between genders. They are means that will give advantages and control to one gender more than the other (Acker, 1990). The consequences of the gendering of leadership as well as the consequences of gender inequalities were evident in the difference in the career progression of women and in the perception of leader, male or female.

Work-life balance of women was heavily discussed in the empirical study. A study from 2018 also showed that in the 29 countries with data available, women spent on average 50% more time than men doing housework or unpaid work (WEF, 2018). Today, the paternity leave in the OECD countries and in Finland are much shorter than maternity leaves (OECD, 2018; KELA, 2019) this gives fathers the advantage considering work experience and career progression. But the system in place also restrict father's time away by principle. Organisations should create a balance between maternity and paternity leave. This could reduce the inequalities women face in their careers because of their maternity leave.

But there should also be a change in society and a change in company cultures. There should not any more be any preconceptions on a woman's capabilities based on if she has/wants children. The challenges in recruitment and work life will be avoided if mentalities change. This could be done through a thorough communication, work from organisations to condemn bad practices and through training on the matter.

Maternity was mentioned as the main reason to explain the under-representation of women in leadership position. The reason brought up was often that it was because organisations did not have any processes and structures in place to support women when having children that the impact on women's careers was so important. Companies need to have the right structure in place to support women (and men) that need time off when having children. Practical and concrete solutions could be more flexible working hours or possibility for remote work.

Some challenges can be seen in recruitment, career progression and everyday work habit. For example, organisations might favour male candidates over female candidates if they fear that she will have kids and therefore have to leave work for some time. That way, women might be seen as riskier choice for organisations. Being out from work life, women might have fewer months or years of experience. This might also favour male candidates who usually are either not out of work-life when become a father or then only taking few days/weeks paternity leave. The final consequence is that women might be negatively perceived at work. In a family, it is often the mother that will stay home if the child is sick, that will leave work early to pick up the kids and that has also the extra out of work responsibilities. This is also one reason why women might be seen as risky choices for organisations and even colleagues.

Another solution could be having quotas in recruitment. By having quotas, a company has more control over the share of men and women that is working at the company. This solution was however very criticised in the interviews as it was seen as limiting opportunities for one group more than seen as giving more opportunities to another group of population.

Gender inequality might hurt organisations as they might loose potential good candidates in recruitment or in leadership. A gender equal organisation will be more attractive to women and the organisation will get better candidates. Research has shown that women tend to study longer (Jacobs, 1996) and that women tend to have qualities/traits such as sensitivity, attention to detail or empathy that have shown to be of great need in leadership positions (Eagly, 2007). The study found that women might not feel welcome or fit or have the ambition to apply to some leadership positions because of the all-male current representation.

Overall, the study found that the managerial implication was very important. Finland has often been praised as a country where gender equality is high. However, women in leadership is still not the norm. Company's promoting women to the position of CEO are praised, the news is communicated as "a female CEO has been promoted". When men are promoted to CEO, it is not communicated as "a male CEO has been promoted". The change of perception and a change in society needs to be led by organisations and people need to be informed on the matter. The change of belief that a leader is a man and the change that the image of a leader is based on a male stereotype will go through communication of information to society and within organisations.

6.3 Suggestion for future research

This study was focusing on the case of a business university in Finland. The interviewees and respondents were all staff or students from the business university and knowing that the business university provides courses in leadership, management for example, it could be assumed that the interviewees and respondents had prior experience, knowledge or opinions on the topic of leadership and gender. Similar business universities exist all around the world, making possible a comparison between students and staff might unable for an analysis of the impact the cultural setting has on students' knowledge of leadership and of gendering of leadership.

Conducting the study on another group could be interesting, for instance it could be conducted in an organisational context, comparing for instance staff and leadership

perceptions. This could be relevant as the study showed that organisations have a big role to play in the perception of leadership.

As this study showed a clear difference in perception between male leaders and female leaders, it could also be interesting to focus on one of the two groups and conduct an in-depth research on their feeling of how they have been perceived.

Finally, the cultural context could also be different. Finland is known to be a country where gender equality is high, and the discussion is very present. For instance, the all-women current government shed light on several issues in society. Choosing a less progressist context, for example a Southern European country could be an interesting base for further research. Some other cultures also put men on a much higher place than women and women even have limited basic rights. This needs to be taken into considerations when choosing a context for further research.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Background questions:

What is your role at Hanken? Which department are you linked to?

How has your experience as a student/professor/etc. In Hanken been?

How long have you been at Hanken?

Leadership and perception of leadership:

1) What is your definition of leadership?
2) Can you name some people that you consider as leaders? Why is he or she a leader?
3) How do you recognize a leader?
4) What are specific characteristics/ traits a leader should have?
5) Do you believe some traits/ characteristics are completely incompatible with the role of a leader?
6) Is leadership more about skills or personality?
7) Can one become a leader? Can you train leadership? Or are you born a leader?

Perception of self:

1) Do you perceive yourself as a leader? Why/Why not?
    - If not, what do you think you lack to become a leader?
    - If yes, what traits or qualities do you think make you a leader?
2) Is leadership linked/relying on hierarchy?

Gender and leadership:

1) Do you believe that leadership is linked to gender?
2) Do men and women lead differently?
3) Are they perceived differently?
4) Are the expectations the same?
5) Do you see men or women as more suitable for leadership roles? Why/Why not?

Through your experience as a member in Hanken, do you feel Hanken is a gender equal institution?

- How so?
- What could be done to make it more gender equal?

Gender, leadership and organisations:

Do you believe gender inequalities exist in organisations?

- If yes, which ones?
- How and why do you think such inequalities have appeared?

Statistics show a great underrepresentation of women in top management positions. As an example, in 2018, only 5% of the Fortune500 companies have a female CEO. Why do you think that is?

What justifies that women are not reaching top management positions?

- Is it a personal “choice”?
- Or is it a real limit in society and in organisations?

Do you think gender equality is possible?

Appendix 2

Preliminary survey template

Perceptions of leadership

Hello,

This short questionnaire will take about 5 minutes to complete and aims at understanding your perception of leadership and of leaders.

Based on this survey, I will conduct in-depth interviews on the same topic to deepen the understanding of the perceptions of leadership that people have. You can leave your email address below if you would be interested in being interviewed in December.

Thank you in advance!

Mélanie Oun
melanie.oun@student.hanken.fi

Your gender

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Prefer not to say

Your age group

- ◯ 18-24 years old
- ◯ 25-34 years old
- ◯ 35-54 years old
- ◯ 55-65 years old
- ◯ 65+ years old

What is your role in Hanken?

- ○ Student
- ○ Professor/ Researcher
- ○ Administrative staff
- ○ Other

Name the first person that comes to your mind when thinking about the word "leader". What makes that person a leader?

Your answer

What does being a leader mean in your opinion?

Your answer

Name 3 characteristics/traits a leader should have according to you.

Your answer

Which of the following images pictures the best your preconception of a leader?



Leader 1



Leader 2



Leader 3



Leader 4

Please justify your choice in the previous question.

Your answer

Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?

Your answer

Would you consider taking part in a longer interview to develop this topic further? (In December for ex.) If so, please leave your contact info below and I will be in touch!

Your answer

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