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The importance of confidence in leadership role

Importance of confidence in leadership role

A qualitative study of the process following two Swedish leadership programmes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand the influence of leadership programmes on leaders and co-workers, as well as which mechanisms are involved in the process.

Design/methodology/approach – An analysis was done into 431 free-text answers to questionnaires given to 120 participants in two different leadership programmes and their co-workers six months after their participation, using a grounded theory inspired approach.

Findings – The result is a model, linking internal psychological and external behavioural aspects, with the central outcome that leaders gained more confidence in their leadership role through theoretical models learned, and reflection.

Research limitations/implications – The course participants as well as the co-workers seemed to experience a positive leadership development indicating a value of participating in the courses.

Practical implications – Confidence in leadership role seems important for having positive outcomes of leadership. Although this needs further research, it is something organisations should consider when working with leadership questions.

Social implications – The co-workers perceived their leaders to be calmer, more open for discussions, and willing both to give and receive feedback post training. There appears to be an increase in trust both in the leader and reciprocally from the leader in the co-workers.

Originality/value – Until now there has not been any systematic research into the effects on participants and co-workers following the programmes, despite the fact that over 100,000 have participated in the courses.

Keywords Reflection, Confidence, Leadership development, Developmental leadership (DL), Leadership programme, Understanding Group and Leader (UGL)

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As stated by the Swedish trade union for leaders (Ledarna, 2014) half a million people in Sweden hold leadership positions, 50 per cent of whom find the work mentally demanding and 40 per cent experience not having enough time to fulfil their leadership responsibilities towards their employees (Ledarna, 2014). If given a choice the Swedish leaders would like to spend less time on administration and more on development of their leadership skills (Ledarna, 2014). These numbers indicate an importance of offering leadership development programmes which are effective both in time and in improving leaders' skills in relation to employees.

Two of the most established and dispersed leadership development programmes in Sweden spring from the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Defence University. These are called Understanding Group and Leader (UGL), and developmental leadership (DL), and broach broad leadership issues. Since UGL started in 1981, around 80,000 people have participated, and since DL started in 2002 around 23,000 have participated. In all, over 100,000



Swedish leaders and potential or aspirant leaders have participated in the courses (Swedish Defence University, 2017). The time invested equals 3.8 million work hours.

It is reasonable to assume that the large investments in leadership development, Grint (2007) estimated the yearly sum worldwide between \$15 and \$50 billion, are based on the general belief that leadership has a decisive impact. Leadership development involves two indistinct constructs: leadership and development (Day and Sin, 2011). Leadership is often seen as a process in which deliberate influence is exerted over others with the intention to lead, structure and facilitate activities and relations in a group or an organisation (Yukl, 2012). Development is characterised by change over time (Day and Sin, 2011), this could be viewed as a developmental trajectory (Nagin and Odgers, 2010), portraying a continuous process (cf. Day *et al.*, 2009), where development can occur if there is continuous learning (Day, 2011). Day *et al.* (2009) describe leadership development as a spiral of leader identity, where a person in a leadership situation experienced as positive, strengthens his/her leader identity, but if experienced as negative the opposite spiral can occur.

The importance of leadership is well established in research, e.g. the quality of leadership correlates with employees' self-perceived health (Tepper, 2007), well-being (Arnold *et al.*, 2007), motivation, contentment/commitment and performance (Söderfjell, 2007), as well as team co-operation (Gundersen *et al.*, 2012). Vast amount of resources are devoted to leadership training programmes, but there is comparably little research that evaluates these efforts (Avolio *et al.*, 2010), including the eventual effects (Ready and Conger, 2003; Salas *et al.*, 2012; Day *et al.*, 2014), and how these effects evolve (Avolio *et al.*, 2009). The relatively less research on leadership development depends, according to Day and Sin (2011), on the complexity in studying the two indistinct constructs of leadership and development. Development is characterised by change over time, leading to a demand for longitudinal studies (Day, 2011).

Research shows that whether there is a positive effect of leadership development depends on the trainee him/herself, their respective organisation, and on the programme (Gurdjian *et al.*, 2014). The trainees' pre-training attitude concerning self-efficacy (i.e. self-confidence in one's actions) and intrinsic, as well as extrinsic motivation to lead (Chan and Drasgow, 2001), tend to impact the results of the training (Avolio *et al.*, 2010; Grossman and Salas, 2011). Furthermore the trainees' attitude towards feedback influences the learning process (Maurer, 2002). Salas *et al.* (2012) pointed to the role of the organisation and the importance of pre-training analysis of the needs of the organisation, and post-training support and opportunities to use the new skills for the trainees.

Adult development is to a high degree a function of experience (Moshman, 2003). Adults typically retain 10 per cent of what they hear in classroom lectures, but nearly two-thirds when they learn by doing (Gurdjian *et al.*, 2014), which implies that a leadership programme should involve "doing". This is in line with the Kolb learning cycle (e.g. Kolb, 1984, 2015): starting with a concrete experience, adult learners review and reflect on the experience, followed by conceptualization of what was learned from the experience, and lastly active experimentation, i.e. trying out what was learned from the experience, then onwards to a new experience and so on. Kolb (1984, 2015) underlines reflection as a way to analyse past and current experiences, creating a foundation for more accurate actions in the future.

Peer learning can contribute to transferring knowledge from training to practice (Avolio *et al.*, 2010), since communication between peers can be less threatening than feedback from a supervisor inasmuch as issues of evaluation and power are minimised. Further, peers can be more open and inquisitive with one another and explore more fully areas of critical cognitive conflict (Alon, 2010; Argyris, 1991; Ladyshevsky, 2006).

The above-mentioned research has influenced the design of two leadership courses in Sweden: UGL and DL. There has been a study conducted on the personal predispositions of the UGL-trainers (Rapp Ricciardi *et al.*, 2014). But until now there has not been any

systematic research of the impact on leaders and co-workers after the leaders have gone through UGL or DL, something this study tries to ameliorate. The rationale behind the DL and UGL programmes is to target leadership factors that are possible to change (Swedish Defence University, 2017). The aim of this study is to increase the understanding how the programmes' influence leadership and work groups, as well as which mechanisms are involved (for further description of the courses see below). These programmes are selected for their prevalence as well as their theoretical foundation. In this study we have added a gender perspective, although not present in the theoretical underpinnings of the courses. The perspective on gender here considers whether co-workers perceive the actions of the leaders differently depending on the leaders' gender.

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Methods

Study setting

UGL. UGL builds on group development (e.g. Bion, 1961; Schutz, 1958; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977; Wheelan, 2005) as well as on the DL model (Larsson *et al.*, 2003). More and more organisations form their workforce around teams (West, 2012), which implies adding factors such as group development and effective teamwork into leadership training as important (Hackman, 2002; Salas *et al.*, 2012; West, 2012; Wheelan, 2005).

The foundation in UGL is from the evidence-based model "The integrative model of group development", IMGD (Wheelan, 1994). Members of a group must first establish, build, and challenge roles and relations, before being fully able to focus on the tasks at hand (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). Based on these ideas Wheelan (1994) concluded that the development of groups over time comprises discernible stages, and the order in which these stages occur can be modified in reaction to changes (Figure 1).

The objective of UGL is for the participants to become more effective as group members and leaders. Learning occurs through experience of situations reflecting group dynamics,

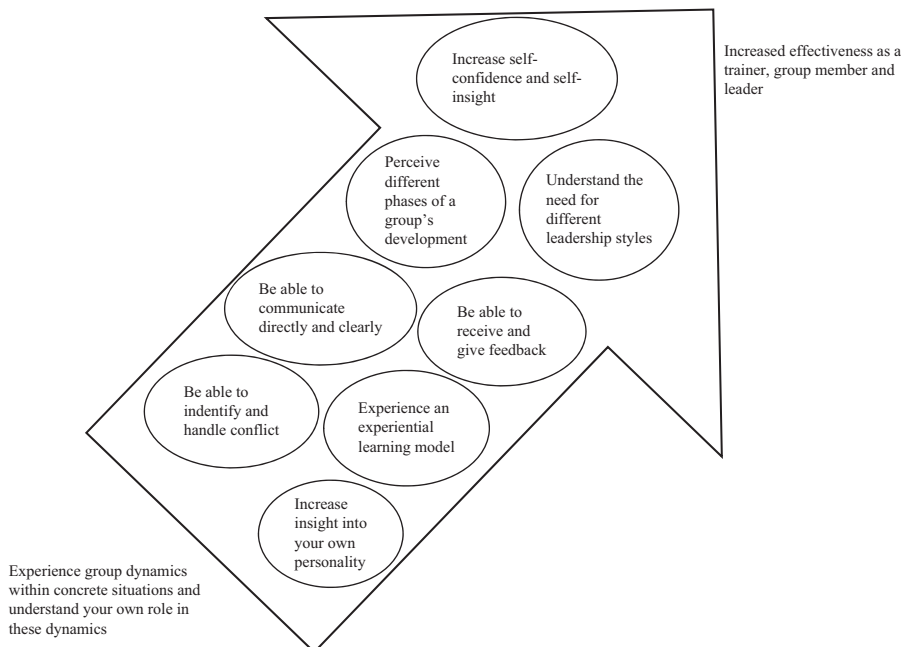


Figure 1.
UGL

group development and understanding the participants' own role in these situations or dynamics through an experiential (experience-based) learning model (Kolb, 1984, 2015). The leadership model DL (Larsson *et al.*, 2003) is introduced during the course related to the development of the group, and what style of leadership promotes both task solving and group development. An important part of the course is both peer learning and learning to handle differences. The group is therefore composed of people from different workplaces and backgrounds, professions, age and gender. A course group generally consists of 8-12 (initial) strangers who interact during five days in an off-work location. Two specially trained and qualified facilitators run the course.

DL. DL is compared to the UGL a less intense course in time (two to three plus one days) and without the prerequisite that participants should be from different workplaces.

The DL model (adapted from Larsson *et al.*, 2003) can be characterised as a refined and adapted version of Bass's (1998, 1999) transformational leadership, into a Scandinavian context. Transformational leadership (Bass, 1998) is one of few leadership styles shown to deliver a positive impact in general on organisations (Avolio *et al.*, 2009; Bass, 1999). According to DL, leadership styles are built on the interaction between leader characteristics and contextual characteristics. Leadership styles are viewed in a hierarchy going from the less desirable laissez-faire leadership, through conventional leadership including control and the more positive demand and reward styles, to the most desired style: DL. The leader acting as an exemplary model characterises the DL, showing individualised consideration and demonstrating inspiration and motivation (Larsson *et al.*, 2003). The rationale behind the DL programme is that these leadership actions can be taught and developed through training (Swedish Defence University, 2017).

As a preparation for the course the participants distribute a questionnaire, Development Leadership Questionnaire (DLQ), evaluating their leadership styles to their co-workers and leader, getting a 360-degree evaluation of their leadership. DLQ is a 66-item questionnaire developed and tested for solid psychometric properties (Larsson *et al.*, 2003; Larsson, 2006). A central part in the programme is the participants getting feedback on their own results, as well as plans and tools for improvement. This is followed up on the second part of the programme, three to four months after the initial days.

The Swedish Defence University has copyright of the concept and certifies the trainers of both UGL and DL.

Methodology of the study. This study analyses the answers to free-text questions given to participants and their co-workers six months after course completion. The result from the quantitative 66-item questionnaire for DL participants is reported in Larsson *et al.* (2017). Course participants showed a significant decrease of laissez-faire leadership and negative conventional leadership when measured by ratings by co-workers.

A grounded theory inspired approach (Charmaz, 2006; Kempster and Parry, 2011; Starrin *et al.*, 1997; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was chosen to explore, identify and describe a conceptual model of course-participants' and co-workers' views on perceived effects of the leadership developments. The purpose was to formulate an internally valid model based on the data, which makes sense in and can be useful for the context from which it is drawn (Kempster and Parry, 2011).

Informants

The selection of informants was made as follows. First, course instructors, who were authorised by the Swedish Defence University as facilitators of the courses, and employed by Swedish leadership consultant companies, were told about the study. Their role would be to inform their coming course participants about the research study. In the second step, the course participants were told about the study through written information provided

by the Swedish Defence University. This was given about one month before the first course meeting. When signing up for the respective courses participants were asked in a written request whether they were interested in participating in the research study or not, and signed an informed consent via e-mail. The inclusion criteria were that they were leading a group of at least six people working together, and that both course participants and at least three of their co-workers were willing to spend 20-30 minutes filling out a web-based questionnaire three times, including the free-text questions as well as questions on group dynamics and leadership in the group. The course participant told their co-workers about the study, and these were also given information about their right to withdraw at any time, via a link to the questionnaire. As a bonus for participating in the research, the course participants were offered an extra day of feedback on their results led by the Swedish Defence University's experts in the field.

In total, 753 leaders were asked to participate, 268 accepted (UGL 161, DL 108). In the present study the focus is on those 120 leaders (60 UGL of which 38 women, and 60 DL of which 33 women) who had at least three responding subordinates on each of the measurement occasions. These leaders came from both private and public organisations, employed in administration, service professions, industrial production, schools or health care. Regarding hierarchical position, 12 per cent were frontline leaders, 75 per cent were middle managers and 13 per cent were higher level managers.

Data collection. Data were collected from October 2013 until May 2016. The participants and their co-workers were measured thrice: before the course, one month after and six months after. The free-text answers used in this study were given six months after the course ended.

The course participants in both UGL and DL answered the free-text questions: What from the course has thus far been of most value for you? Their co-workers were asked to reflect on the following statements: "I have noticed the following change in my leader since the course [...]" and this change has influenced me in the following way [...]. The questions were formulated from the research teams idea that both the course participants and their co-workers should have an opportunity beside the questionnaires to more freely express their thoughts on the (possible) impact of the courses.

Data analysis. The analysis started when the research group had received data from the first 77 participants in UGL and DL. The data from the final 43 participants were used to validate the findings. These latter additions to the analysis did not change the categories, indicating that data had reached a level of saturation with the first batch. During the coding process, theoretical memos were kept continuously. The rationale behind the memos was to develop a theoretical sensitivity, and capture ideas and thoughts during the process (cf. Kempster and Parry, 2011). The first step in the coding process was to analyse the answers with open coding, in which the statements were labelled close to the data. In total, 384 statements were identified as meaning units (codes) and labelled with words being close to those used by the informants (see examples in Tables I and II). The open coding ceased when patterns started to evolve, indicating processes, leading the coding to become more selective, finding concepts, which allowed the data to be grouped. At this stage, the open codes were set against raw data and theoretical memos, creating more abstract categories. These categories were thereafter used to generate an empirically grounded model, generated from discerned patterns in the data. The first and last author did the coding, the latter with no experience of either UGL or DL, and first author with experience from participating in both courses. The two coders worked individually in the coding process, where each of the 384 statements was categorised. During this process the identity of the informants (whether course participants or co-workers, men or women, or if commenting on the same participant) was unknown to the researchers. The data from UGL and DL were separated during coding. The results were then compared and with the

LODJ	Example of free-text answers	Codes	Categories
	To believe in myself and dare to implement my decisions without worrying about being disliked. To not wait too long with implementations in difficult situations. That I have the decisive power to influence the outcome of my work and work surroundings this encourages me to take matters in my own hands instead of letting go (Participant/Leader)	Leaders' confidence in own role increases	Inner aspects
	The insight of how I am actually influenced by others. That I'm seen as confident in my role as project-leader (Participant/Leader)		
	Demonstrates more presence in questions regarding the group's work and situation and voices the opinions of the group in a decisive manner. Always refers to the group as "we". These changes have affected me in a positive direction in that I feel great support from our leader <i>vis-à-vis</i> the organisation and that he stands behind the group (Co-worker)		
	I think my leader has become, how shall I put it, weaker. If that's because of the program or not I couldn't say (Co-worker)	Ambiguity/weak confidence in leadership role	
	That I shall drive my points all the way; I don't need to check around if others agree. How and that I give constructive feedback. That I shall listen to others, not only to myself (Participant/Leader)	Intentionally implementing leadership models	Overt behavioural aspects
	I think she's better at saying no, being straightforward without being too woolly (Co-worker)		
	My leader has changed her attitude, she's better at listening and trying to understand, nicer and you can clearly see that she wants (to improve), then it's up to each and every one if you're receptive [...] I don't withdraw anymore, instead I feel like I belong to the group and I'm relatively secure when it comes to my relationships with my co-workers and my boss (Co-worker)	Increased clarity in leadership role sparks employees' participation	
	I've been supported in a good way on some occasions lately. This has made me a bit more optimistic concerning the future (Co-worker)	Empowering by participation raises employees' satisfaction with group and work	
	My leader is more open and responsive to other solutions. This renders more joy and less stress in one's work (Co-worker)		
	He communicates what he wants and what he expects from his co-workers more clearly. This was very evident straight after the course, but has diminished a bit over time (Co-worker)	Leadership tries but fails	Inner aspects not aligned with overt behavioural aspects
	I think my leader has become, how shall I put it, weaker.	Employees' work	
	If that's because of the program or not I couldn't say.	motivation diminish	
	It is tougher and you become more irritated when mistakes are noted, but nothing happens (Co-worker)		

Table I.
Codes and categories describing UGL

backdrop of the theoretical memos, categories were chiselled out. The computer program NVivo was used in this process.

In the Finding section the whole model will be presented first, followed by a presentation of its categories and codes. The reason for this order of presentation is that the parts receive their meaning when understood in relation to the whole model.

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Example of free-text answers	Codes	Categories
<p>To get acknowledgement on how my unit perceives me was very valuable. It helped me focus on things others graded lower, such as inspire more and be more empathetic. That some of my other traits and skills are received positively by my co-workers makes me more secure in my leadership role (Participant/Leader)</p> <p>I became a bit more confident and I dare challenge more in my leadership role, since I have more trust (confidence) in my capacity (Participant/Leader)</p> <p>Our leader is seen as more comfortable and secure in his/her leadership role. Gives directives more clearly, which creates a better working climate. A more transparent task distribution induces a greater sense of security amongst co-workers (Co-worker)</p> <p>My feeling is that he's had a hard time finding himself in this (Co-worker)</p> <p>I think he was a better leader before when he was acting like himself. Now there's a lot of "as part of my developmental leadership" in e-mails, etc. (Co-worker)</p> <p>I've noted that critique in any form is not received well. Have later associated that with her feeling her leadership being questioned (Co-worker)</p> <p>I think more on how and that I give constructive feedback, and that I shall listen to others not just occasionally (Participant/Leader)</p> <p>To be a better listener. Have patience and wait for the co-workers opinions and reactions. I try hard not to get angry in discussions, but I've still got some work to do there. Trust and understanding of what I'm doing also needs to get better (Participant/Leader)</p> <p>Clearer in how she wants things. Better listener, acknowledging what's being said, doesn't just rush by in the same way any longer. Shares her thoughts, opinions and perspectives more – functions better as a link to the organisation. Dares to be more personal. Shows ambition in wanting to gather the team (Co-worker)</p> <p>He shows an awareness of strengths, limits and areas for improvement. It's easier to mention problems or areas of improvement related to co-operation and the work situation. Since our boss has shared his resources and improvement areas it's become easier (for me) to show my weak points. This facilitates a straight and open communication about the work situation (Co-worker)</p> <p>It feels like I'm functioning in a context again, my understandings of which discussions that are held in the organisation and how they permeate down to our level have improved. It feels positive that we will gather and work as a team (Co-worker)</p> <p>He's more aware in his role as leader. Sees us individuals in a clearer way. When my boss sees me more I become positively influenced which of course influences my work in a positive way (Co-worker)</p>	<p>Leaders' confidence in own role increases</p> <p>Ambiguity/weak confidence in leadership role</p> <p>Intentionally implementing leadership models</p> <p>Increased clarity in leadership role sparks employees' participation</p> <p>Empowering by participation and clarity raises employees' joy and commitment</p>	<p>Inner aspects</p> <p>Overt behavioural aspects</p>

(continued)

Table II.
Codes and categories describing DL

LODJ

Example of free-text answers	Codes	Categories
<p>Our leader seems to try harder to inform us as soon as she can, and takes more initiatives for common activities. An active and present boss makes me happy (Co-worker)</p> <p>It got better for a while, our leader was more often present at work, but now it's the same again (Co-worker)</p> <p>In my earlier assessment I thought I saw changes that increased my confidence in my leader. These have now fallen back to how it was earlier [before the course] (Co-worker)</p> <p>I think he was a better leader before when he was acting like himself. Now there's a lot of "as part of my developmental leadership" in e-mails, etc. This has a negative ring to me, instead he could send out something in line with "thought this could be interesting for you to see". It's not as much fun at work anymore. I don't feel the same support as before which makes it a bit harder to work (Co-worker)</p> <p>I've noted that critique in any form is not received well. Have later associated that with her feeling her leadership being questioned. This has affected me so that I avoid criticism or questioning in any form, since I don't know what reactions to expect. If it hits you back as a reprimand, which has happened to both me and colleagues. I haven't experienced this in other workplaces, and it is unpleasant (Co-worker)</p> <p>In my earlier assessment I thought I saw changes that increased my confidence in my leader. These have now fallen back to how it was earlier [before the course].</p> <p>Her interest in my work has decreased and our booked meetings where we should talk about different matters are often down prioritized and cancelled. My trust in my leader has shrunk. The consequence is that you become less motivated and engaged (Co-worker)</p>	<p>Leadership tries but fails</p> <p>Employees' work motivation diminish</p>	<p>Inner aspects not aligned with overt behavioural aspects</p>

Table II.

All the written answers were given in Swedish; excerpts presented in the text have been translated into English by the authors.

Ethics. The study was approved by a Swedish Research Ethical Committee (EPN Dnr 2012/1905-31/5).

Findings

The emerging model

The effects of UGL and DL (Figure 2) can be understood as a process beginning with leaders returning to the work place with new knowledge and skills in relation to leadership and teamwork. The knowledge and skills can be seen as overt behavioural aspects. The influence process can then be described as following one of two routes, where the watershed seems to be inner aspects of the leaders, i.e. enhanced or diminishing confidence/ambiguity towards own leadership role. In order for the gains from the course of increase in leadership knowledge and skills, to make a positive impact on co-workers' satisfaction, the leaders' confidence in their own roles plays a vital part. When confidence in leadership role weakens, the impact can be employee dissatisfaction. Thus, the programmes may influence

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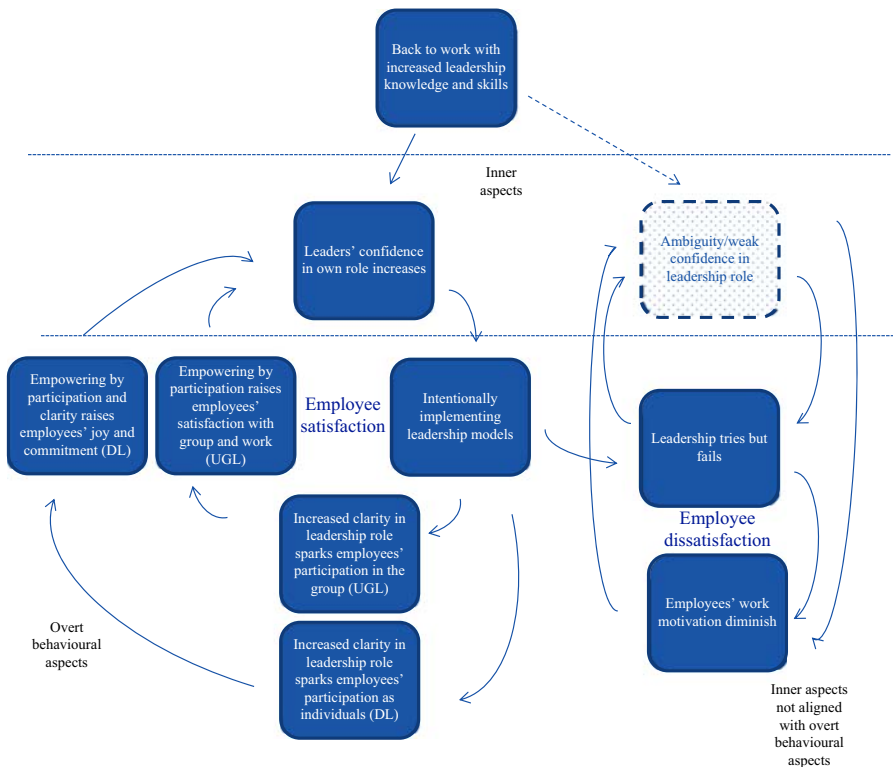


Figure 2. Model of effects of UGL and DL on leaders and co-workers

intra-psychological as well as overt behavioural aspects, where an increase in leadership skills seems to be perceived as genuine if it is supported by confidence.

The increased confidence route can lead to the leader intentionally implementing leadership models successfully. The employees recognise new leadership behaviours and experience them as clearer, thus leading to higher levels of participation and commitment. In addition, the employees experience empowerment and sometimes even joy. In the weakened confidence/ambiguity route, the leader tries to use their new knowledge and skills with the intention to make improvements, but fails. The employees experience dissatisfaction and disappointment with their leaders, partly because they harboured expectations of a positive change.

The data can be interpreted in a model where the starting point is leaders returning to work with a boost of understanding of leadership. This was interpreted as an overt behavioural aspect. Whether this also implies a positive or more ambiguous inner aspect seems to depend on the leaders' relationship towards confidence in own role. The course-participants stressed the importance of having time to reflect during the course, and learning the importance of reflection both on their own role and that of their co-workers, and the opportunity to discuss with other leaders (peers). This appears to have contributed to an increase in trust in self and own leadership skills. Back at the workplace confidence can increase or it can wane, giving rise to different chains or spirals of reactions in leaders and in employees. Here interpreted as overt behavioural and inner aspects. What leads to which spiral seems to be with which stamina the leaders implement new models of leadership. When attempts are met with positive reactions from the

employees the behaviour seems to strengthen and the spiral moves towards increase in work satisfaction. When attempts are met with disinterest or negative reactions this eventuates a withdrawal of both the leader and the co-workers.

Underpinning codes and categories of the emerging model

From the free-text answers, the course participants in both UGL and DL answered: What from the course has thus far been of most value for you? Their co-workers were asked to reflect on the following statements: "I have noticed the following change in my leader since the course [...] and this change has influenced me in the following way [...]" codes and categories were created. An interesting finding was that the same categories emerged from both UGL and DL, albeit the road leading to them diverged slightly. As well, there were few discernible differences in the wording or opinions based on the gender of the course participant. There were some indications of male leaders deemed as softer by their co-workers after the course than before, and female participants as less hostile after the course than before. Since systematic gender differences were not obvious no specific marks whether the codes are built on quotations from men or women are made.

Three categories were created out of nine codes: overt behavioural aspects, inner aspects and inner aspects not aligned with overt behavioural aspects (see Tables I and II).

Overt behavioural aspects

The code "Intentionally implementing leadership models" was created from the study informants describing the course participants' conscious efforts to insert new ways of leading in their daily work (57 answers). This new *modus operandi* could be traced to learning absorbed in the course, if the leader had confidence that the learning would be implemented; thus leading further to the code "Increased clarity in leadership role sparks employees' participation" (25 answers). For UGL-participants the emphasis was on the role of the group, and for DL-participants' on the interplay of leadership, group and individual. Employees of both UGL and DL participants describe how their leader's increased confidence makes the leader calmer, less prone to fault finding, more open to discussions, feedback and problem solving. The leaders' more positive attitude influences their co-workers and the work group in a positive way, leading to a greater desire to participate. This increased influx of energy into the work leads to the codes "Empowering by participation raises employees' satisfaction with group and work" in UGL, and a slightly different take in DL: "Empowering by participation and clarity raises employees' joy and commitment". These codes pointed towards the visible behavioural changes in the leader creating invisible changes in the co-workers. The category was thus named overt behavioural aspects.

Inner aspects

The category inner aspects emerged from the code "Leaders' confidence in own role increases". Both participants and co-workers from UGL and DL wrote about the increased confidence the leaders felt themselves (68 answers) and as experienced by the co-workers (73 answers). The category was thus named since it demonstrated internal changes within the leaders, experienced by the co-workers as behavioural changes interpreted as stemming from an increase in leaders' confidence.

There were no comments from the course participants indicating a weakening or ambiguity in leadership role as a result of the training, but there were some from co-workers. The comments are interpreted as a negative process where the programmes did not have a positive influence on the participants' confidence in self and/or in their leadership, forming the code "Ambiguity/weak confidence in leadership role".

The category overt behavioural aspects emerged from codes interpreted as giving rise to a positive spiral starting with the code “Intentionally implementing leadership models”. This was created from the study informants describing the leaders’ conscious efforts to insert new ways of leading in their daily work (57 answers). This new *modus operandi* could be traced to learning absorbed in the course, if the leader had confidence that the learning would be implemented; thus leading further to the code “Increased clarity in leadership role sparks employees’ participation” (25 answers). For UGL-participants the emphasis was on the role of the group, and for DL-participants’ on the interplay of leadership, group and individual. Employees of both UGL and DL participants describe how their leader’s increased confidence makes the leader calmer, less prone to fault finding, more open to discussions, feedback and problem solving. The leaders’ more positive attitude influences their co-workers and the work group in a positive way, leading to a greater desire to participate. This increased influx of energy into the work leads to the codes “Empowering by participation raises employees’ satisfaction with group and work” in UGL, and a slightly different take in DL: “Empowering by participation and clarity raises employees’ joy and commitment”.

A different route was also indicated, either when the before mentioned interpretive code “Ambiguity/weak confidence in leadership role” confronted the work-life situation, or when efforts of using new leadership models failed. This gave rise to the category “Inner aspects not aligned with overt behavioural aspects”. The category was thus named, since it was thought of as a conflict between the leaders’ overt behaviour and the results for the co-workers. The category was formed from two codes: “Leadership tries but fails and Employees’ work motivation diminish”. The programmes led to a few employees describing increased dissatisfaction with leadership and work: in the UGL case just one negative and in the DL case five. From these negative comments the codes “Leadership tries but fails and Employees’ work motivation diminish” were created. The leaders were not able to influence the co-workers in the outwardly intended way, since the new ideas were not fully internalised in the leadership role. The co-workers described this as the leaders trying to use what they had learnt, but in a superficial way. Also added was expectance from the co-workers of a positive change in leadership, where this change was not sustained (Table I).

From the participants in UGL the increased confidence seems to stem from a growth in self-confidence as a member of a group, and with new knowledge of how they are both affected by and have the possibility to influence a group. The co-workers of UGL participants describe a leader who is more present and willing to listen and thereby invite participation. This change induced greater satisfaction with work for the co-workers (20 answers). Mutual trust and ability to cooperate increased their sense of self-efficacy, productivity and work satisfaction as team-members, as well as a decrease in perceived stress levels. In the UGL case one leader was perceived as weaker after the programme, while the leader thought the course had made him a much better listener. The perceived weakness made the employee irritated and less positive to conducting his/her work (Table II).

For participants in DL the increase in confidence seems to come from the 360-feedback on their role as leaders they all received at the beginning of the course; from the reflection on these results with other course participants as well as from new knowledge acquired in the course. The co-workers of DL participants have described their leaders as more structured, setting goals and pointing out the way forward. This change induces a feeling of joy and increased commitment to their work (7 answers). Amongst the co-workers of the DL participants it was noted that some leaders were more withdrawn after the course, invoking speculations whether the leader had perceived the 360-feedback as critique. There was also disappointment; some leaders returned as bringers of change but did not keep it up, and a leader who was perceived by the co-workers as putting on a fake role of DL.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to understand UGL's and DL's influence on leadership and co-workers, as well as which mechanisms are involved.

In general, the leaders gained more confidence in their leadership role. Two important contributors to building this increased confidence appears to be the theoretical models learned during the programme, thereby supporting existing findings (e.g. Avolio *et al.*, 2010; Bass, 1999; Hackman, 2002; Wheelan, 2010), as well as the opportunity for reflection during the course. Reflection both in solitude (through the writings of a journal), and together with peers seems to have increased learning and broadened the scope of possible action. This is in line with Argyris (1991) and Kolb (1984, 2015). Most of the co-workers also experienced positive changes. They perceived their leaders to be calmer, more open for discussions, and willing both to give and receive feedback, thus shouldering their responsibilities as leaders. There appears to be an increase in trust both in the leader and reciprocally from the leader in the co-workers. Trust in the leader is fundamental in transformational leadership (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002), which is the base for DL (Larsson *et al.*, 2003), as was taught in the programmes. Mutual trust and ability to cooperate boosts productivity in interdependent work-groups as shown in research by Wheelan *et al.* (e.g. 2003), as well as an increased sense of self-efficacy and work-satisfaction in team-members and decrease in perceived stress levels (Jacobsson *et al.*, 2016). The emphasis put on the leader's confidence in his or her leadership role may constitute an important finding. It can easily be developed into a "necessary but not sufficient" proposition in future research (cf. Dutton *et al.*, 1994). However, it goes beyond the scope of this qualitative study to make such general claims (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

A few of the co-workers were dissatisfied with the outcomes of the leadership training. In line with Day *et al.* (2009) it seems like the leadership development can take a negative spiral. The co-workers had hoped for a positive change in leadership that did not occur or was not sustained. Sjøvold (2008) points out the danger of trying and failing to bring about positive changes in the work group; the disappointment might induce a backlash leading to a negative loop. This was something that was noted in a few cases. The negative loop could undermine leadership confidence and give rise to laissez-faire leadership with adverse consequences, such as deteriorating teamwork or work motivation (e.g. Wheelan *et al.*, 2003; Larsson *et al.*, 2003; Söderfjell, 2007).

According to the suggested theoretical model (Figure 2), which theoretically fits into the process model family (Glaser, 1978), the effects of the leadership development evolved from an individual process in the leader. In this process the inner aspect of an increase in self-confidence in the leader role led to overt behaviours demonstrating increased clarity in leadership role, which in their turn led to an intertwined process between the leader and the co-workers co-creating a new leadership style. This co-creation of leadership is supported in many of the modern leadership theories, such as Crevani *et al.* (2010) discussing leadership as a process of interaction in daily mundane activities, and Parry and Bryman (2006) launching the idea to view leadership "as a widely dispersed activity which is not necessarily lodged in formally designated leaders [...]" (p. 455). Maybe this study on UGL and DL to some degree captures this everyday creation of leadership, where gender and gender stereotypes play at most a minor role, which could explain why no differences in wording due to gender were identified. This would be in line with Jackson and Parry (2008) pointing out that in the literature there is no consensus on gender differences in leadership styles (p. 25), and sex is no predictor of behaviour (Yukl, 2006). Yukl (2006) stresses that statistically the intra-sex differences between people of the same gender are much larger than the inter-sex differences.

A mediator in co-creation of leadership in the findings appears to be the increased use of feedback both given from leaders, and an openness and encouragement to receive.

This is also supporting the findings of Maurer (2002) of the trainees' attitude towards feedback influencing the learning process. Notably the increase in confidence precedes the change of overt behaviours; this can be in line with findings by Chan and Drasgow (2001), where an increase in confidence gives rise to further willingness and openness to training, as well as openness to continual development of leadership. The result is also in line with the research of Palm *et al.* (2015) showing the positive outcomes for the employees when the self-confidence of the leader increased.

The long-term effects of UGL and DL do not differ, but the process did. The participants in UGL focussed on a new understanding of the group and their own place in it, whereas the participants in DL started their development from an understanding of themselves and their role as a leader. In this study it is not known why leaders choose a certain programme. The choice could be based on whether they had more interest in the individual as a leader, or team leadership. It could also be based on their respective organisations' wishes. From earlier research it is known that this choice is important since the match between organisational need and course content impacts the outcome (Salas *et al.*, 2012). Because the programmes have either a focus on the group or the individual, the individual leader's choice may affect the outcome. It is therefore likely that it is important for participants to make a conscious choice about which programme to participate in.

Methodological considerations

There were more answers from the participants in DL and their employees than those in UGL: 254 compared to 177. The answers from the DL group were longer, in total 5,417 words compared to 2,975 from UGL, and more focussed on detailed descriptions of behaviours influencing the work atmosphere. This difference might be explained by the DL-participants and their co-workers being more used to giving evaluations, since they were asked to do a 360-degree evaluation pre-course.

A drawback was that this study was conducted on information only from free-text questions with no possibility for follow-up questions.

The selection of the study participants might have been biased towards the participants and their co-workers getting the most out of the programmes - or the least. In this perspective the conclusions should be interpreted with caution. However, the process of leadership development should not be biased by whether the participants were overly positive or negative. The respondents came from a wide variety of workplaces, and were both men and women, which strengthens the general conclusion on the process of leadership development. The findings during the whole process were presented to the group of authors and other researchers studying the effects of UGL and DL with quantitative methods. Preliminary results were also presented to the leaders participating in an extra feedback day, and they confirmed the findings.

Conclusion

This study contributes to an understanding of the effects of UGL and DL, which have not been studied before. The model presented identifies a number of potentially important psychological and behavioural aspects where increased confidence in leadership role is crucial for employee satisfaction, independent of gender. On the other hand, when confidence in own leadership role weakens the impact is likely to result in employee dissatisfaction. Thus, the programmes influence intra-psychological as well as overt behavioural aspects. Where an increase in overt leadership skills seems to be regarded as genuine by the employees if it is backed up by confidence in leadership role. Further research is needed to evaluate the accuracy of this model and to inform existing leadership theories.

Practical implications

Confidence in leadership role seems important for having positive outcomes of leadership. Although this needs further research, it is something organisations should consider when working with leadership questions.

This study, with 120 participants from both UGL and DL affecting at least 360 co-workers, points to the fact that the programmes do have impact on leadership.

Neither UGL nor DL is tailor-made for a specific organisation, but it seems like these more general issues that are raised during the programmes still can develop leadership.

It is, however, important for the organisation and the participant to consider that by being away from the workplace expectations are raised by co-workers of a positive change when returning to work again.

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