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Self Awareness in Leadership

A Case Study on how a Leadership Development Course can Contribute to Self Awareness

Abstract

These years there is a tendency to focus on the personal side of leadership, and in the area of leadership development courses this is slowly starting to take root. In this thesis a case study of one such course is conducted. Through interviews with four of the participants in the course and observations I have inquired into how a course in leadership development and organizational change can contribute to the development of leaders' self awareness.

Through analysis of data from the interview 5 categories were found, which were "Being aware of yourself," "Deep personal process," "Surprises that led to discoveries," "Authenticity," and "Challenges for reflection". To discuss these categories I mainly drew on Kegan (1982, 1994), Joiner & Josephs (2007), Jordan (2002) and Scharmer (2009). The informants pointed to the experience of the course helping them to go a bit deeper in themselves than they would normally do, and they expressed how they were challenged to reflect on new aspects of themselves.

In the last chapter I put the findings from the interviews together with my observations by using Scharmer's Theory U as a model to depict and discuss the process of the course. By doing this I found that the course contained elements that can contribute to the development of self awareness. I also found that the individual developmental level influences what each person get out of the course. This implies that facilitators of such courses need to pay attention to this to help support people's growth in the best possible way.

Preface

As this work is coming to an end I realize that it has been a rather long and very interesting journey. Coming from a background of working with children and loving it, it might seem like a giant leap to move on to leadership development, but to me it has made perfectly sense. There is SO much more that I want to learn about this complex area that I have been touching through this work. Many books to read, much more to understand in a more profound way, and time will show where this leads me.

So…this is the place to give some thanks to the people who in different ways have influenced this work – and me! First of all I want to thank my four informants. I am very grateful that you have shared your stories with me and given me a possibility to draw on your experiences.

I want to thank my supervisor, Jonathan Reams, who have been an invaluable support. Thank you for many interesting discussions, for guidance and encouragement through challenges along the road. Thank you for the opportunities you have given me, for believing in me and for helping me to trust the process. I also want to thank Ninni Sødahl for helping me to open my eyes to patterns and links that I did not realize existed. You are both extraordinary people, who have inspired me a lot.

Thanks to my fellow students in the counselling program for interesting discussions, for someone to talk to when the challenges have been overwhelming and most of all for lots of fun and coffee breaks!

Thanks to my family and friends for meeting me with open arms during "rehabilitation stays" in Denmark, and finally, thanks to my dearest John Richard for always supporting and challenging me, and for your never-failing belief in me.

Sine Bjerregård Hanssen.

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1. Introduction

For some years now it seems to have been a well known truth that Einstein's saying *"we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them"* is quite relevant when talking about how we create and develop organizations and leaders that have the capacity to navigate the weathers of financial crisis and ecological as well as social challenges in the world. Steen Hildebrandt, Ph.D, Danish professor, mentions in his 40 years anniversary script (2008) that we are facing an enormous innovation challenge in the area of leadership development. Old theories and models are insufficient to describe the requirements of today, and he points to Otto Scharmer (2009) who addresses this challenge by talking about *"leading from the future as it emerges."* This represents one new perspective on how the leadership challenge of our time can be approached and many more are available, but Scharmers Theory U seems to represent a tendency in the world of leadership to emphasize human resources and human development to create real transformation in both leadership and organizations.

The realization that we have to start considering how we use the resources of the earth have also spread to the area of organizational transformation and leadership development. Emphasis is put on sustainability (Scharmer 2009, Hildebrandt 2008, Senge et al 2004), on human beings as valuable assets that need to be invested in, and on creating innovative organizations and personal development in employees and leaders. Research is conducted that inquires into aspects of leadership that have been (and to a certain degree still are) considered to be alternative: The effect of meditation on leaders' efficiency (Dagens Næringsliv, 2.11.2009, Joiner & Josephs, 2007), the intelligence of the heart and how leaders can lead from the heart (Bolman & Deal, 2001) and the focus on using personal coaches are examples of this turn towards a focus on what can be characterized as a more integral way of looking at leadership.

This move also opens up for the area of counselling and coaching to play a role in leadership development. A lot of effort is put into education and support for leaders to enable them to meet the challenges they face and courses and programs for leadership development are numerous. Kegan & Lahey (2009) refer to Ronald Heifetz when they distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges. Technical challenges need technical solutions – e.g. learning new technical skills. But Kegan and Lahey's point is that the change challenges we face often requires more than this. They

are of a more adaptive kind, and require a transformation of our mindset. Kegan and Lahey (2009) state that within the field of leadership development there has been a tendency to focus on developing skills instead of developing the way we make meaning. Research shows that leadership development is one of the key factors in creating growth and success in organizations (Joiner & Josephs, 2007), and thus I found it interesting to inquire about how a leadership course can contribute to this development.

My personal interest in leadership was initiated by my experience with two very different leaders. For a long time I have wondered what it was that made them so different from each other, because it seemed to be subtle things that I could not pin point. I had many questions about this: Is it possible to cultivate the ability of being a good leader? Or is it something you are "born with"? Is it simply a question of "personality"? My meeting with constructivist-developmental theory helped bring light to some of these questions. I found explanations in the theory about how people can develop to higher levels of consciousness, and how this has a huge influence on the way they communicate, make meaning and relate to the world, and thus also influences the way they lead. One other aspect that I became interested in was awareness and our ability to reflect upon ourselves. I realized that these two aspects had been crucial in how the two leaders had been practicing leadership, and this personal experience has been fundamental for me to inquire into this subject through this thesis.

The concept of self-awareness seems like one of the subtle things that can make a difference for leaders and my inquiry in this thesis will be to try and have a closer look at how a course in leadership development might stimulate this growth in people, and how this is experienced by leaders. Many such courses exist with various content and focus. My approach will be qualitative and look at one single course as an example. This leads me to my research question being:

> *How can a leadership development course contribute to participants' development of self awareness?*

1.1. Structure

First, I will present the theory I base my thesis on, and that have been used to interpret my data. Second, I will describe my methodological approach to the study. Third, I will present the categories that emerged from the analysis of the interviews, and in the following chapter I will discuss these by using theory. Then I will weave together my findings from the interviews and the observations by using Theory U as a frame work and finally make a summarizing discussion and consider implications for further research.

When I am speaking about a person in general terms I have chosen to use the word "he" because I think it makes the language more fluent than using "he/her".

2. Theory

In this chapter I will present the theoretical perspectives that the thesis is based on. The process of creating a theoretical base started with my interest in constructivist-developmental theory and self-awareness. Through the process of observing and interviewing new theoretical perspectives have been included and my understanding has evolved. First, I will present constructivist-developmental theory represented by Robert Kegan's theory (1982, 1994), and subsequently show an example of how this is applied to leadership development. Second I will present different perspectives on the concepts of self awareness, discoveries and authenticity. Finally I will present Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), which I have used as a tool for understanding the process of the course.

2.1. Constructivist-developmental theory

Constructivist-developmental theory is based on the works of the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, but focuses on adult development. The constructivist-developmental theorists are also called neo-Piagetians and here I am going to focus on Robert Kegan's theory as a representative of them. Constructivism focuses on the way people make meaning of their experiences. This meaning is thus constructed through the way we interpret our experience. The theory is developmental in its focus on how this meaning making grows more complex over time (McCauley et al, 2007).

Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) describes five *orders of consciousness* when he talks about how this meaning making can develop throughout our lifespan. The orders of consciousness that mainly concerns adult development are what he calls 3rd, 4th and 5th order consciousness and my primary focus will be on these.

The process of development is explained through subject-object relationships, which represent a distinction in the way we make sense of our experience. What is object to us are the aspects of our experience that we can actively relate to, reflect upon, look at, make choices about, be responsible for and are aware of. The subject refers to the aspects of our experience that we are identified with, embedded in and unable to reflect upon. We are unaware of them and therefore we can not make choices about them or question them. Kegan (1982, 1994) says that what has been subject at one stage of development becomes object at the next stage, which implies that the further you develop, the more you are able to take your own way of making meaning as an object of reflection.

Kegan (1994, Kegan & Lahey, 2009) argues that the demands the modern world puts on people today can not be answered by using lower orders of consciousness. Kegan & Lahey (2009) say that when we experience the world as too complex we are not just experiencing the world's complexity, but also a mismatch between our own complexity and the world's. Kegan argues that only a qualitatively change in the complexity of our minds will enable us to live up to the growing complexity in all aspects of our lives – including the world of work and leadership. He makes a distinction between a traditional, modern and postmodern order of consciousness (earlier referred to as 3rd, 4th and 5th order). Ideally the 5th order of consciousness is needed to manage to navigate the complex post-modern society, but most people do not even reach the 4th and very few reach the 5th order of consciousness.

Roughly described, the traditional consciousness – also called *the socialized mind* (Kegan 1994) - is about becoming a socialized member of society, identify with norms and values and preserving connections to people around us. The traditional consciousness relies on external validation – from the outside in, and is occupied with living up to expectations from others.

The modern consciousness is what Kegan (1994) calls *self-authoring*. *"So we are not just made up by or written on by a culture, but we ourselves become the writer of a reality that we then are faithful to."* (Debold, 2002) This implies that the person is able to step back enough from the social environment to have an internal authority and define what is valuable and make distinctions about the expectations on us and sort out which to follow and not. (Kegan & Lahey, 2009)

The postmodern consciousness, that very few people today have, is characterized by *self-transforming* (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Now you are able to hold on to multiple systems of thinking, are open to contradictions and are less occupied with holding on to one formation of the self. You are able to step back from your own system of thinking and reflect on the limits of it.

The previously mentioned demands for greater complexity of mind also includes new demands on leaders. Kegan & Lahey (2009) assert that the field of leadership development has *"overattended to leadership and underattended to development"* (p. 5). This implies that there has been a search to identify the most important skills to overcome the challenges of leadership. Kegan & Lahey (2009)

suggest that instead of focusing on learning new skills and knowledge we need to focus on the way we make meaning. They use the analogy of new files and programs being brought to an existing operating system. These might be useful, but to really benefit from them you need to transform the operating system itself.

Mezirow's (2000) concept of *transformational learning* describes how this development can be supported. We all have a body of experience that makes up our definition of the world – once this is established new experiences are structured to fit that view. An experience that does not fit within that established world view is – in the terms of transformational learning – a *disorienting dilemma*. This dilemma (might) lead to a re-evaluation of the previously accepted world view, and help provide a new perspective of the world, and a change - or a transformation - of the accepted definition of the world. Kegan (in Mezirow and associates, 2000) distinguishes between informational learning (which implies increasing our fund of knowledge, changes in *what* we know) and transformational learning (changes in *how* we know). He emphasizes that both are essential, but that transformational learning is needed in order to develop the complexity of our mind. Thus by challenging for example student's world views educators can help support transformational learning.

In their book *"Immunity to change"* Kegan and Lahey (2009) elaborate on the challenge of how it might be possible to support this development of mental complexity, and their thoughts have been of inspiration in designing the course that I have been doing my research on.

2.2. A constructivist-developmental view of leadership

There are many examples of how constructivist-developmental theory has been applied to leadership development (e.g. Torbert and associates, 2004, Joiner & Josephs, 2007, Cook-Greuter, 2002). They all have different ways of framing the developmental stages leaders move through and I have chosen to focus on Joiner & Josephs. One of the reasons for this is that Joiner & Josephs (2007) have an explicit focus on self awareness, which I found interesting for my research. (Joiner & Josephs' levels are quite similar to Torbert's (2004)).

Joiner & Josephs (2007) way of applying developmental thinking to leadership focuses on what they call "levels of leadership agility." They describe the development of the leader through five

different levels, divided into two groups called "heroic levels" and "post-heroic levels." These are the following:

Heroic levels[1]	Post-heroic levels
Expert level (ca. 45 %)	Catalyst (ca. 5 %)
Achiever level (ca. 35 %)	Co-creator (ca. 4 %)
	Synergist (ca 1 %)

At the expert level the leader creates an organization of individuals rather than cooperation and community, which on the other hand becomes increasingly important as you move through the levels. Thus the leader gets an increasingly broader perspective on the employees, tasks and stake-holders as he moves to higher agility-levels. Feedback is also a central indicator, and at the expert level it is not welcome whereas the leader gets better at using it at the higher levels. Communication at the expert level is primarily assertive and one-way, while mutual communication and listening attitude is more dominant at the higher levels. It is important to note that each level includes and transcends the previous, and thus later orders are more complex than earlier orders.

As pictured above and described by Joiner & Josephs (2007) 90 % of all managers work from a "heroic" mindset (including 10 % at pre-expert level, which I have not included here). Roughly described the heroic levels relate to the socialized mind as described by Kegan (1982, 1994) and around the *Achiever* level you begin to have what Kegan calls a self-authoring mind. Thus Joiner & Josephs support Kegan's (1994) point about the gap between the current complexity of mind in leaders and the complexity of today's society. They also note that expert and achiever leadership worked relatively well for most companies for the most of the twentieth century. But the increasing demands for collaboration, teamwork and organizational change has made it necessary for leaders to develop further and contribute to for example the creation of participative teams characterized by shared commitment and responsibility (Kegan, 1994). To develop to these higher levels of leadership a heightened awareness of oneself is needed, and I will inquire further about this in the next section.

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[1] Around 10 % of all leaders are at the pre-expert level, which I have not included here.

2.3. Views on Self awareness

Joiner & Josephs (2007) say that the underlying dynamic of leadership agility is *reflective action*. This implies *"stepping back from your current focus to gain new insight and make wiser decisions, then engage in what needs to be done next"* (p. 212). The depth of insight you gain from doing this depends on your level of awareness and intent, which again depends on your level of leadership agility. Thus what you reflect upon and the depth of your awareness is increasingly more complex. These different levels are described by Joiner & Josephs (2007, p. 213) as follows. I choose to show all the overview because I think it gives a good understanding of how the awareness and intent are connected and evolve through the levels.

Heroic levels:

Expert:　　Awareness: A modest reflective capacity

　　　　　　Intent: to improve and accomplish things

Achiever:　Awareness: A robust reflective capacity

　　　　　　Intent: to achieve desired outcomes in a way consistent with self-chosen values

Post-heroic levels:

Catalyst:　Awareness: The ability to "step back in the moment" and attend directly but very briefly to a current assumption, feeling, or behaviour that would otherwise escape your attention.

　　　　　　Intent: To create contexts and facilitate processes that are experienced as meaningful and satisfying and that enables the sustained achievement of desired outcomes.

Co-creator:　Awareness: A slightly more sustained attention to the flow of your ongoing experience, giving you a more robust capacity for processing painful feelings and for understanding whole frames of reference that may differ from your own.

　　　　　　Intent: to tap into an evolving sense of life purpose and actualize it in your everyday life through deep collaboration with others

Synergist:　Awareness: Sustained, expanded present-centred attention to your physical presence, including your five senses, thought processes, intuitions and emotional responses

　　　　　　Intent: To engage with life in all its fullness and to be of benefit to others as well as to yourself.

This awareness of ourselves is by Torbert et al. (2004) called super-vision. Torbert et al. say that this super-vision is what enables us to reflect *in the moment* on what goes on inside and around us, and that this heightens our ability to act in ways that take into consideration both internal and external factors. This way of being aware is not something we all experience as it takes long and intentional practice. Often we do not realize our feelings about a situation or details from a situation until long after it took place. How this process of becoming more aware takes place is described by Jordan (2002) and Depraz et al (2003), and will be presented in the following.

Based on Kegan (1982, 1994) Thomas Jordan (2002) describes self-awareness as *"awareness of the behavioural habits, emotions, desires, thoughts and images that tumble through our being."* Jordan (2002) shows an example of how steps to becoming more aware of your ego-processes can be described. The process of making ego-processes an object of attention is described as follows:

1. *Noticing*: noticing that one has a propensity to think in certain patterns, and that those assumptions and interpretations are made from a particular perspective, and therefore possibly biased.
2. *Interpreting / evaluating*: Evaluating if the typical thought patterns one has and if specific interpretations one makes are adequate and desirable.
3. *Transforming*: Intentionally acting to transform one's own undesirable routine thought patterns and ways of making interpretations.

By making something an object of attention we can relate to it, make decisions about it and develop what Jordan (2002) calls self awareness. Thus self awareness can help us grow and develop.

Depraz, Varela and Vermersch (2003) also elaborate on the concept of awareness and how this can be cultivated. They identify what they call a core process of becoming aware, which looks like the below. This is called epochè, which refers to a phenomenological concept of holding back your judgements and putting aside your usual way of looking at things.
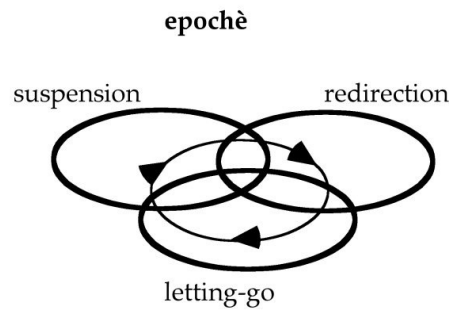
epochè

Fig.1. Epochè. The core process of becoming aware (Depraz et al, 2003)

It is a cyclical process, which implies three parts, which are *suspension, redirection and letting go.* My main focus here will be on suspension. The cycle starts with suspension. Bohm et al. (1991, n.p.) say that *"Suspension involves attention, listening and looking and is essential to exploration."* When you suspend you look at your assumptions and held beliefs from a different perspective – it can be described as hanging it in front of you so that you can look at it from different angles. Bohm et al. (1991) say that if you are able to sustain attention to e.g. a strong feeling that arises in you, it tends to slow you down and might give you access to sense what it is you are normally just doing automatically. According to Depraz et al. (2002) the initial phase of suspension can begin in three different ways, which are:

1. An external event triggers your suspension.
2. Another person tells you to suspend.
3. You tell yourself to suspend.

The second step is redirection, which means moving your attention from the exterior to the interior, to what is inside you. You listen to what you have learned from suspending. The third step is letting go of it again. You have to accept what appears, sit with it and then just let it go. Inherent in this lays a notion of not trying to fix or change what you discover, but instead keeping a light touch and just let it go. (Depraz et al. 2003)

Depraz et al. and Jordan have two slightly different perspectives on how to become aware of our inner workings. Jordan (2002) is focusing more on interpretation and evaluation than Depraz et al. (2003) do. I think that these two ways of working on becoming aware make good supplement to one another, and that Depraz et al. mainly describes what Jordan calls *noticing*. Once you have become

aware of a propensity to do/feel/behave in a certain way you also have a possibility to act on it and to transform it, as Jordan says (2002).

2.4. Authentic leaders

Kets de Vries (2006) describes authenticity as being one of the most important assets of leadership in the 21st century. Authenticity is referred to by Rogers (1961) as *congruence*. I choose to use the expression authenticity as I think it covers both expressions. Rogers (1961) describes congruence as: *"Congruence is the term we have used to indicate an accurate matching of experience and awareness. It may be still further extended to cover a matching of experience, awareness and communication"* (p. 339). Being authentic thus implies that you are aware of inner values, feelings and beliefs, and that what you are doing, saying or expressing is in line with that. Rogers says about persons who are congruent that *"we know exactly where he stands"* (p. 283), which makes people feel comfortable and secure. Rogers mainly talks about this in relation to therapy, but in all relationships this is important, and must be considered as crucial for leaders. To be able to create trusting relationships to followers, colleagues and business-partners is vital. Kets De Vries (2006) is occupied with that and talks about the importance of authentic leaders, and asserts that *"effective leadership in the 21st century will depend heavily on networking structures, which imply a focus on relationships"* (p. 375). Thus the leader must be able to be authentic, to take responsibility for his actions, be aware of his inner workings, recognize his own strengths and weaknesses and to respond to people with sincerity and sensitivity.

As a contrast to being congruent, Kets de Vries (2006) describes how many people are inauthentic and false and put on a façade in the business setting. This may seem like an advantage, because it makes it easier to conform to norms and do what is expected. A chameleon-like person is in that way able to demonstrate "true" commitment to whatever the organization stands for (Kets de Vries, 2006). But this being inauthentic can have negative consequences for the individual. This dominance of a "false self" can produce feelings of alienation and distress and give the person a feeling of being unreal. It is also very likely that people around an inauthentic person will sense it and therefore loose confidence in him. If you make meaning at the 3rd level of consciousness (Kegan, 1994) you will have a propensity to want external validation and to live up to other people's expectations, which might result in acting inauthentic. Thus Kets de Vries (2006)

implicitly makes a demand for a 4th order consciousness in leaders like Kegan (1994) and Joiner & Josephs (2007), even though he is not explicitly using Constructivist Developmental theory.

Argyris' (1990) elaborates on the concept of "espoused theories" and "theories in use," which can be related to authenticity too even though the focus is slightly different. A person's espoused theories are the views that we profess – e.g. I consider it important to delegate. My theory-in-use is what I actually do – e.g. I always do everything myself to make sure that it is done well. Thus there is a gap between my espoused theory and the theory-in-use. This, according to Senge (2006), can be perceived as being a negative thing, but also holds a potential for creative change if I realize the gap and try to learn from it. This relates to awareness because it is about becoming aware of what it is I am actually doing. Senge says that to see what we are actually doing we can benefit from the help of others, and refers to an old saying: *"The eye can not see the eye"* (2006, p. 178).

2.5. Discoveries

As you become more aware of yourself it also becomes more likely that you will discover things about yourself that you previously have not seen. The process of making a discovery is described by Grendstad (1986) as becoming aware of something that has been there all the time, but has been hidden to you. It is like removing a cover, to uncover what lies beneath. To discover something is thus subjective. Only I can discover things for me. Even if you point at it, and tell me that it is there, it will not be discovered by me until I really *see* it or understand it on my own. Grendstad (1986) uses as an example that there is a difference between *being told* that you have a problem and *discovering* that you have a problem. By discovering something you see a bigger perspective and you might do the same discovery at an even higher level, like moving in an upwards spiral movement (Grendstad 1986).

Kvalsund (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2005) talks about *discovering ourselves*, and considers this two sided. On one hand I can discover something about myself that has already been determined about me by the culture and others. On the other hand I can make new discoveries about myself, which might not have been seen by others before. Either way these discoveries gives me a choice: I can accept them as being me, or I can discover that I do not want to be made up by how others define me. I might want to change the determinations about myself made by others and myself. This points

to the creative side of the discovery: I am not merely a passive discoverer, but have the possibility to create myself through the discovery.

Grendstad (1986) also talks about how making discoveries implies that you have to let go of old views and understandings, or at least redefine them. To some this can feel threatening and like their world is falling apart. How you deal with this varies from person to person and also depends on what it is about. This is similar to what transformational learning is about as it challenges the world view you hold. To make discoveries we need to remove ourselves from our habitual way of thinking, and Theory U (2009) is a way of describing how this process can take place. This will be described in the next section.

2.6. Theory U

Theory U is a comprehensive theory, which uses the U as a picture of how processes can unfold – both at an individual level and collective level. In "Theory U" (2009) C. Otto Scharmer uses the U to describe different aspects and puts different content and depth to it. I am aware that there are many facets in this complex theory that I do not include here. I will only give a brief introduction to the theory and I will focus mainly on the fundamental principles that lie in the U.

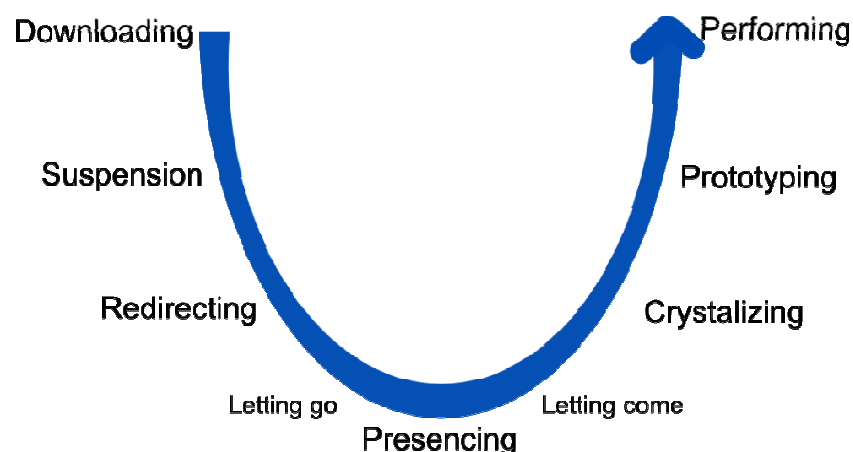The basic U can be depicted as the following:

Fig. 2 (Scharmer, 2009)

The overall frame is the U, and it symbolizes a descent into a deeper place on the left side and an ascent towards action on the right side. The left side of the U is inspired by the three gestures of becoming aware from Depraz et al. which are described in the section above.

The starting point at the left side is *downloading,* which is what we do when we base our actions on what we always do and on our habitual view of how the world is. This limits our possibility to see other perspectives and to be open to new possibilities for development and action.

The first step towards the bottom of the U is *suspending*. Suspension is needed to see things as they really are. We need to lay aside our judgements placed on past experience and just observe what it is we are experiencing, what other people are telling us and so on. Scharmer calls this "seeing with fresh eyes."

After suspending is *redirection*. This means that we move our attention from the exterior to the interior, and try to see our own role in what we are experiencing. Instead of "blaming the system" we move our perspective to seeing ourselves as "a part of the system."

The bottom of the U is called *Presencing,* and is a crucial point. The word Presencing is a blend of *sensing* and *presence* and is described by Scharmer as the meeting point between two different selves in us: one self is the person we have become as a result of a journey that took place in the past. The other self is the person we can become as we journey into the future. *"When these two selves talk to each other, you experience the essence of presencing"* (Scharmer, 2009, p. 41). At the initial phase of presencing is focus on "letting go." Through the descent side of the U we have connected to and become aware of what *is*, and now we have to let go of that, to let go of the old and *"surrender to the unknown"* (Scharmer 2009, p. 184). Thus we prepare ourselves to connect to our future possibilities, and this process starts in presencing. The move up the ascent side of the U is initiated by *Letting come*. Here the new starts to emerge; we start to see what needs to be done next. This is followed by *crystallizing* which is where we start to envision how the future can be. So the focus is on keeping the presencing throughout the right side of the U, but also begin to operate from it. This contrasts with just visioning, because this can be done from any place – even from downloading, which would then keep us in the same old patterns and not create real change.

In the next phase, which is called *Prototyping* we start to experiment with taking action. By trying out e.g. new behaviour or creating concrete prototypes allows for fast-cycle feedback and can give us clues about if we have chosen the right direction. The last phase of the U process is *Performing* which brings us back to the macro level. The focus still needs to be on acting personal and keeping the connection to what one has discovered through the U process, but without getting stuck in a new pattern.

One of Scharmer's main points is that we have a "blind spot" when it comes to seeing the source from which effective leadership and social action come. We do know a lot about what leaders do, and how they do it, but Scharmer points to the fact that we know very little about "*the inner place, the source from which they operate*" (Scharmer, 2009). This is inspired by a talk with Bill O'Brien, who states that *The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener*" (Scharmer, 2009). Thus theory U provides what Scharmer calls a new social technology, which focuses on how we can gain access to deeper levels both individually and collectively and thus try to illuminate this blind spot. Scharmer also introduces the concept of *"acting from the future as it emerges."* This implies that instead of only learning from the past or repeating past patterns we have to move our focus to learning from the future possibilities that lie ahead of us. This understanding adds a new dimension to how reflection can be done, which is normally understood as learning from past experiences. E.g. Schön (2001) uses the two different notions "reflection *on* action" and "reflection *in* action." Reflection on action is what we do when we reflect on an experience that we had in the past. Reflection in action refers to how we reflect in the moment as the situation unfolds, and is similar to the way you are able to reflect and be aware at the higher levels of Leadership Agility (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). Scharmer suggests that we move even deeper and through *Presencing* obtains an awareness of our own potential and the future possibilities that lies ahead. This implies that we dare to open up and let go of the old, and to let the future come and look forward.

In this chapter I have created a picture of the theoretical framework on which I base this thesis. Taking an outset in constructivist developmental theory represented by Kegan I have focused on how this is applied to leadership development. This implies a demand on leaders to become more aware of their own inner workings, and I have shown different perspectives on what self awareness is and how it develops as you move through developmental stages. Authenticity is about how this

awareness shows in your actions and to describe that I have used Kets de Vries and Rogers. As you become more aware of yourself you are likely to make discoveries about yourself, and to describe this I used Grendstad and Kvalsund. Finally I have given an overview of Theory U, which provides a framework for how processes can take place both individually and collectively.

3. Methodological choices

3.1. Research strategy

My intention in this project was to inquire into how the development of leaders' self awareness can be supported, and one of the first things to do was to find out how to approach this inquiry methodologically. Early in the process I was offered the chance to participate as an observer in a course on the subject Leadership Development and Organizational Transformation which is a part of the Master in Organizational Leadership program at NTNU. I had been considering to only do interviews with leaders, but as this opportunity showed up I found out that combining observation and interviews with people who had gone through a course with the same theoretical basis seemed ideal. In this way I got a chance to observe how participating in a course like this might enhance self awareness. I got the opportunity to take a closer look at the context in which they had been working with their personal development as leaders, and thus I was able to base my research on two different data sources, that is interviews and observation.

The above facts led me to the conclusion that I wanted to do a case study. A case study is meant to give description of that which is studied, in its natural context (Postholm 2005), and this was what I was interested in doing. I found that the natural setting would be to be present during the course, and then talk to some participants afterwards. My aim was to combine two perspectives on the course: The informants' experience of participating and their experience of self awareness and my observations and interpretations of what went on during the course. This kind of case study is what Postholm (2005) calls a *descriptive and interpreting* study. Thus it aims at describing, supporting, challenging and developing existing theory (Postholm, 2005). It is described as a duet between the participants' perspective and the researcher's scientific point of view, which emphasized very well my intention. This study is what Stake (1995) calls an instrumental case study. Hence, the course is used to describe how a specific phenomenon is developed. You might say that the course is used as an instrument to inquire into how self awareness can be supported and developed.

The interviews were meant to enhance the emic perspective (Postholm 2005). That is the perspective of the participants on self awareness and how they saw their own development in

relation to the course. By using observations I also included the etic perspective (Postholm 2005), which is the perspective of the researcher.

3.2. Data collection

My data was collected through observations and interviews. Using multiple sources of data is called triangulation (Yin, 2003, Patton, 1990, Stake, 1995), and is done to support the findings. I saw it as an interesting opportunity to include different perspectives on the course and thereby get a richer description.

3.2.1. Contact to participants

My main criterion in my process of finding people to interview was that they had to be participants in this specific course and that they had to have some kind of experience in working as a leader. The participants in the course have different backgrounds and work in different organizations, something I considered positive because my focus is on their personal experience and had nothing to do with the kind of organization they work in. Consequently the particular job they were doing had no significance to me.

First I contacted all the participants in the course via e-mail and gave a brief introduction to my project and asked any one that might be interested to contact me. In a few days I had four people, who were willing to be interviewed, and we set up dates for the initial interviews. I made a participant consent form, which they read and signed when we met to do the initial interview (Appendix 1).

3.2.2. Initial interviews

Before the course started I did initial interviews with all four participants. My intention was to get a short impression of who they were and what thoughts they had about self awareness. Another important aspect for me was to introduce myself and to get to know them a bit before I started to observe in class. There were no possibility for me to make a preliminary visit because the participants came from different parts of the country, and therefore the initial interviews also served as a way of getting acquainted with the informants and initiate confidence. These interviews lasted for 15-30 minutes. I have not used them explicitly in the thesis; rather I drew on them when making the interview-guide and to get an impression of the informants. This choice was made during the

research process as I realized that I wanted to emphasize the participants own experience after the course, and not focus on "before and after" the course.

3.2.3. Observations

Postholm (2005) describes observations as being a continuous interaction between the theoretical perspective of the researcher and the practice that is observed. This can help construct new perspectives on both theory and practice, and was a main reason for me to choose to do observations. To me the observations were also important to get an impression of how the course was conducted.

The course was structured around three gatherings, five days all together. I wanted to be present all of the time to get thorough observations, and on the first day of the course I presented myself and said that I was going to observe, and would just be looking at what went on. At first my intention was to be what Gold (1958, in Postholm, 2005) calls a "complete observer." I wanted to be the "fly on the wall" and just observe. But already on the first day I realized that my role also had elements of a participator, and I was more of an "observing participant" (Gold 1958, in Postholm, 2005). In some situations it was natural for me to blend in with the participants and I asked them short questions now and then to clarify e.g their experience of the activities and how they worked in the groups.

During my observations I made notes by hand. I divided the paper in two and on the left side I wrote what I saw happening, and on the right side I wrote my immediate thoughts and interpretations of it. Appendix 2 shows an example this. I also noted questions that I thought would be helpful when I was going to do the interviews after the course. After each day I looked through my notes and tried to get an overview over what I had seen happening that day. This helped me formulate new questions and see things to inquire further about.

My observations have contributed to make a richer description of the course, They gave me an insight into the context in which the informants had been working and an impression of what they had been through. I also wanted to look at which methods were used in the course and how they related to theory about the development of self awareness. By being present during the course I also got to know the informants a little, which I hoped would help them to feel more relaxed and open in

the interviews that followed. In my discussion part I draw on theory, observations and interviews to bring in different perspectives on how the course contributed to the participants' development of self awareness.

3.2.4. In-depth interviews

After the course was over I did in-depth interviews with the four informants. I chose to do semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1994) because I considered it to be the best to try and balance between my guiding the conversation and the interview person getting the possibility to talk about the topic in a way that made sense to him. I considered it helpful to have questions written down to guide the conversation, but I also tried to follow up on what the informants said. (For interview guide, see appendix 3).

Kvale (1994) states that *"the statements of the person being interviewed are not collected – the interviewer is a co-author of them"* (p. 182). To me this points to the fact that all data are constructed in the meeting between me as the researcher and the informant. I have to realize that I as a researcher am influencing the answers through my questions, through my responses and the whole context. This is inevitable, and points to the constructive nature of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and reminds me that I have to be aware of the pre-conceptions I bring into the process. I experienced each interview as a unique construction of meaning between the informant and me.

The interviews were recorded on tape and I chose not to make any notes during the interviews, as I wanted to keep my focus on the informant. I also tried not to be too hung up by what was written in my interview guide and only looked at it to make sure that I had been through the subjects that I intended to go through. I did this to try and keep a dynamic conversation and to really listen to what the informant said.

The interviews were held in different settings according to how it suited the informants. This was primarily for practical reasons, and I do not consider it as having had any significant influence.

3.2.5. Transcription of interviews

I transcribed the interviews myself and tried to do it as soon as possible after they had been conducted, because I wanted it to be as fresh in my mind as possible. During the transcription I got

new perspectives on what the informants had said and wrote down ideas that appeared to me. I felt that the process of transcribing brought me closer to the data material, which is also mentioned as an advantage by Kvale (1994).

The interviews were done in Norwegian and the transcripts were kept that way until I used them in the thesis. It has been a challenge to translate the statements into English because of the specific meanings that often lie within a language. Sometimes I felt that it was hard to find a suitable translation to entirely cover what was actually said, but I have tried to make them as accurate as possible.

3.3. Method for analysis

The analysis of the data goes on all the way through the research as a dynamic process (Kvale, 2000, Stake 1995). From when I first stepped into the classroom I started interpreting what went on just by making notes on certain things and leaving other elements out. This points to the fact that I as a researcher use myself as an important instrument and has to be aware of my own assumptions and preconceptions as I bring them into the process of analyzing. My aim was to be as inductive as possible and have an open mind to what I met in the data collecting process. To me this became an act of balancing between trying to be inductive and open and on the other hand not forgetting that I had certain presumptions that would colour the way I made sense of the information I found. Even though the analysis starts from the moment one sets foot on the place of research, a distinction can be made between analysis during the data collection and analysis of the collected data material in retrospect (Postholm 2005).

In the analyzing process I have used elements from The Constant Comparative Method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) to help structure my data material. A statement from Patton (1990, p 372) became important to me in this process: *"In short, there are no absolute rules, except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study."* Thus it was important to me to have some kind of pattern to follow, but at the same time keep the main focus on what would work best for my specific work process. I have used the Constant Comparative Method as an inspiration to structure the data material and make the categories, but I do not consider this a pure Grounded Theory study. A main purpose in grounded theory is to generate new theory, but that is not what I intended to do. I have thus discussed my

findings in the light of existing theory instead of generating new theory. The constant comparative method has mainly been an inspiration to me in the process of structuring and finding the essence in the data material.

It has been important to me to follow what Patton (1990, p. 372) also expresses: *"however analysis is done, analysts have an obligation to monitor and report their own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible."* This is what I intend to do next.

3.4. The analyzing process

Right after the interviews my head was full of thoughts about what each of the interviewees had said. I made a few notes after each of the interviews to sum up my immediate impression of what seemed to be the main content of what that specific person had said. According to Stake (1995) there is no particular moment when the analysis begins, and I had a feeling that my immediate notes would be of importance later on in the analyzing process.

After the interviews were transcribed I read through the material and made notes as I was reading. This process was both interesting and challenging since I had to go through the material several times to begin to extract the meaning and to put it together and turn it into categories. To structure the material I used elements from The Constant Comparative Method (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), which consists of three steps. That is *open coding, axial coding and selective coding.* My analyzing process consisted of all these three phases even though I made intuitive jumps from one to another all the time. An example of this is that I quite early had an intuitive idea about a category called "from subject to object" based on my observations and my first times of just reading through the data material**.** But as I worked more on it and returned to look through the data material again, it was changed into "surprises that lead to discoveries," which were much closer to what had been expressed by the informants, and less coloured by my theoretical basis.

First I went through the open coding process, where I tried to identify and label phenomena in the text. I primarily labelled whole sentences, which made the data material easier to handle. During the axial coding process I tried to relate the coded sentences and paragraphs to each other and create more substantial categories. This was a rather time consuming process, and I had to start over again a couple of times, because I had a feeling that I was on a wrong track. I cut the transcriptions into

pieces, and arranged them in piles with other statements that I thought represented the same. It was an interesting process, and is hard to describe. During this I experienced the interaction described by Strauss & Corbin (2008) between the empirical data and my own theoretical insights, which are hard to put completely away during a work like this. My experience was that as I worked through the coding process I gradually let go of my preconceptions and theoretical insights, and was able to listen more and more to what the data was actually saying.

The last part of the analyzing process is selective coding, which is about finding a core category, to which all the other categories relate. This core category was the one called *"Being aware of yourself"* and I consider this category to relate to all the other categories. *"Being aware of yourself"* thus in some way contain elements that point to the four other categories.

3.5. Ethical considerations

I have based a major part of my study on studying people, and this brings up different ethical aspects to consider (Kvale, 2000, Postholm 2005). One is to secure confidentiality. I have done this through changing the names of the informants in the thesis, and I left out details that might point to who the informants really are.

Before doing the interviews I made a participant consent form that the informants signed before participating (Appendix 1). Here I emphasized that the informants were free to withdraw from the project at any time, and that the data material would be made anonymous, and deleted after the thesis work has been finished. At the beginning of the course I also told all of the participants in the course what my role would be, but did not mention who my informants were.

This project has been reported to and approved by the NSD (Norwegian Social Science Dataservice) because I was dealing with personal information about the informants. This requires that I reported what I intended to do, and that they get a status report after the work has been finished. I include the letter that confirms the approval (Appendix 4).

Kvale (2000) also mentions that it is important to consider if the research will have any consequences for the people involved. The consequences of participating will vary from person to person, and it is hard to determine whether there have been negative consequences for some of the

informants. I have focused my interviews on creating reflection in the informants, and hopefully this has had a positive effect.

3.6. Me – the researcher

When I approached the work on this thesis I was aware of the fact that I as a researcher am an important instrument in the research process (Postholm, 2000, Allgood, 2005). Lincoln & Guba describes this in a fine sentence: *"The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are unseperable"* (1985, p. 94). Thus I want to be explicit about what has coloured my view on the thesis work, both experiential and theoretical. I consider myself to be more of a practitioner than a theorist, and a lot of my preconceptions are what Allgood (2005) calls *experienced knowledge* retrieved from my years of work as a pre-school teacher.

Coming from a background as a pre-school teacher I have always been interested in how awareness of what I do, feel, think, say can influence the way I relate to other people, because I found that I was my most important tool in working with children and their families. Constructivist-developmental theory has influenced my thinking about leadership development, and coloured the way I approach my research. From the start I have been interested in looking further into how people make meaning at different stages and how this influence their way of being leaders. The opportunity to do my research in a course that has its outset in constructivist developmental theory has of course reinforced my choice of this theory as a base for this thesis, but it was clear to me right from the start that my pre-conceptions were influenced by these theories.

My interest in awareness has coloured the work on the thesis in different ways. One is that I am interested in finding out how this might be supported and developed. Another aspect is that I have worked with my own awareness of myself. As a researcher I bring my ideas and preconceptions into the research, and from the start I have tried to make clear what they are. But as the work evolved I became aware of new sides of myself: my role as an interviewer and observer confronted me with some of my preconceptions that I was not aware of from the beginning, I got a clearer view of my own opinions and I became aware of resistance towards finishing the work. During the interviews I got a great chance to practice awareness: I had to listen deeply to what the informants told me, while at the same time being aware of my own way of formulating the questions and at the same time keeping some kind of overview of where the conversation was going in terms of the

purpose of the conversation. I really learned a lot from that. Thus I have experienced that this work has influenced me – both on an intellectual and personal level.

3.7. Research quality

To verify the quality of the research Kvale (2000) refers to the trinity of generalization, reliability and validity, which are often considered of a positivistic character, but Kvale (2000) argues that they are also useful in qualitative research with a slightly different emphasis. I will in short describe how I have considered these three perspectives on quality in my research.

In doing a qualitative case study there is no intention of being able to generalize the results directly from one case to a larger population. The purpose of a case study is primarily to get an understanding of this specific case (Stake, 1994, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). But still there may be a possibility for what Stake (1994) call naturalistic generalization. Naturalistic generalization is a process where readers gain insights by reflecting on the details and descriptions presented in the case study. Thus the descriptions in this thesis might to some extent parallel with experiences of the reader, and may enrich the understanding of the readers own situation. By making rich descriptions and trying to stay true to the data material I hope this is possible.

Reliability has to do with the degree to which the research can be trusted (Kvale, 2000). To work towards reliable research I have focused on describing the different steps in the research process to make clear what I have done. I have tried to remain critical towards my own way of formulating the questions in the interviews so that they would not be leading. Also I have aimed at making the transcriptions and translations of the interviews as accurate as possible. Kvale (2000) points to an interesting balance that I have also experienced: That even though reliability is important, a strong emphasis on it might work against creativity and diversity. I have focused on making research that stands on a theoretical and academic base, but at the same time tried to keep a certain level of personal engagement to it.

Validity focuses on whether the research is credible, that is if I am actually examining what I intended to examine (Kvale, 2000). The process of securing validity implies all phases of the research process (Kvale, 2000). By using multiple sources of data – called triangulation (Stake, 1994) - I have tried to obtain rich descriptions, which contributes to heighten the validity of the

study. I have also made my own preconceptions clear and tried to stay aware of them through out the process and trying to have a critical perspective on my own analysis and interpretations. Another way to heighten validity is doing member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Stake, 1994). Member checking involves having the informants look through the descriptions and interpretations to see if they recognize what the researcher has gotten out of the data (Stake, 1994). I did this by sending the participants the categories and my interpretations of them and they read it through. The answers I received from them were positive and expressed that they recognized the citations I had used. One out of four did not participate in the member check.

4. Presentation of empirical data

My data for this inquiry consisted of interviews and observations as mentioned in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will first provide a description of the context the research was done in. Second, I will make a short introduction to my observations. The observations have also been used as support for some of the categories as will be mentioned along the way. Third, I will present the categories that emerged from the analysis of the interviews, which will be discussed in chapter 5.

4.1. The research context

The course that I have been observing is a part of the Masters in Organizational Leadership program at NTNU and focus on *Leadership Development and Organizational Transformation*. The students are mature professionals, primarily leaders in different organizations. The course is organized around three gatherings and is five days all together. At the first gathering the participants were introduced to a 360 feedback instrument called The Leadership Circle Profile (TLCP) (www.theleadershipcircle.com). TLCP measures two primary leadership domains, which are *reactive tendencies* and *creative competencies* and these are linked to Kegan's (1982, 1994) socialized and self-authoring structures of consciousness. Its focus is thus on showing opportunities for developmental growth by including multiple perspectives on the leader.

 Between the first and second gathering this feedback was collected from employees, peers, bosses and the participants themselves. At the second gathering the participants got their results and debriefing from the facilitators to help them see where there were gaps between their self perception and how others experienced them. This was supposed to help them see potential for development. After this they started working with the results. The participants were asked to identify one core issue that they would like to work on, and thereby the 360 feedback provided a framework for the individual to build upon throughout the course. Much of the work with these issues were based on Kegan & Lahey (2001), and an exercise called the four columns, which is influenced by what they call Immunity to Change (see appendix 5 for the four column exercise)**.** They assert that we all carry this immunity mechanism that prevents us from making the changes we want to make. Going through the four column exercise is thus supposed to bring peoples awareness to what they do or not do that prevent them from making the changes they wish. It is also meant to identify what big assumptions that lie behind this. The key to overcoming the immunity to change is not to

immediately try and change it, but more to become aware of the mechanism working within us, and to begin to test if the assumption that we hold is true. Thus the participants were asked to create an action plan and to try it out between the second and third gathering. This could e.g. be having a conversation about someone at work about the TLCP, trying out a new behaviour or sharpening their awareness of how the held assumptions affect their lives. At the end of the course the participants wrote an essay, which also focused on these reflections.

4.2. Data from the observations

In this section I will describe in short the main points from the observations. The observations coloured the way the interviews were conducted and contributes to the base from which I view the whole process of the course. Thus it is hard to describe in detail what they are, but I have chosen to first make a small summary and give some examples here, and second to integrate parts from the observations in the discussion section.

Observing the course has given me ideas about how people experienced different parts of the process. An example of this was the reactions when people received their feedback from the 360 survey. First the atmosphere in the room was full of excitement and anticipation, and after getting the feedback I saw many different reactions. I got the chance to listen to some of them getting debriefed, and saw that they had many questions and were both surprised, in shock and in denial.

I also noticed that the morning check- ins and afternoon check-outs gave hints about how people experienced the course. This was done with people sitting in a circle on chairs, and one by one expressed how they had felt since last time we met or during the present day. Examples of this are that some said they had become more aware, some that they wanted to change certain behaviours and some expressed confusion and frustration.

Through observing I got an understanding of the curriculum and how it was used to help people understand their own situation and themselves. Through group and individual exercises the participants were involved and asked to use themselves as examples. Only a small amount of the teaching was done through traditional lecturing. Many of the exercises seemed to challenge people and at first they seemed confused and not used to it. As the course proceeded people began to speak more in plenary and the atmosphere became more intense and people seemed more engaged.

4.3. Presentation of categories

In this section I will present the categories that emerged from the analysis of the interviews. In the process of analyzing I have tried to be as inductive as possible, and put away my preconceptions. I think it is inevitable to also do a kind of interpretation just by making these specific categories. I found five categories through my analysis, and found that the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) was "Being aware of yourself." I will present this core category first, followed by the other four categories.

4.3.1. Being aware of yourself

As I worked through the data material I realized that there was a pattern that pointed to a Norwegian expression, for which I found no proper English translation. In Norwegian this expression is "*å kjenne seg selv.*" The word "kjenne" has two meanings – that is *to know* and *to feel* or *sense*. What I realized was that both meanings of the Norwegian word were represented in the interviews, and that they pointed to different ways of being aware of yourself. To me this one expression contains two aspects of self awareness. One is to know yourself – in the sense *being acquainted with* in a more external manner, and the other is to sense or feel what is going on inside you – here mainly described as being present to yourself. The notion of *"å kjenne seg selv"* is quite similar to being aware of yourself, and I have chosen to present these two dimensions in one category, called *being aware of yourself*, but still keep the Norwegian expression in mind.

This category is also what I consider to be the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) Even though I have separated this category and used specific statements to represent it, I also think that the rest of the categories can be related to this one category, "Being aware of yourself." I have spent some time considering this, because it seemed obvious because my background for the interviews was to inquire about self awareness. But as the Norwegian expression "å kjenne seg selv" appeared to me it became clear that the essence in what the informants said was circling about this expression. To me this was a slightly different way of understanding self awareness than the one I brought into the research process.

Anna describes how she has the experience of being present to herself when she is aware:
"It is to be...to be aware of how I react when I react. To be present inside myself, while there are things going on around me. In a way…as a coach you are present here and now with coachee. This

is in a way to be present in yourself *here and now. And in a way being aware of what is going on inside of me, while things are going on around me."*

She explains how this feels to her as "becoming more whole":

" I get...in a way...it gets more whole… I become a more whole person in a way. Because I feel that I have some feelings inside me, or feel that something is going on inside me even though it is not coming out on the surface, and that it in a way is a part of me and is reacting inside me without getting out….it is in some way…In some way I get to know myself better in a way. Hard to explain. Yes, I do. Because I get aware of the situation that brings forth those feelings or reactions in me."

This being present to yourself is also described by Brian. He has become more aware about the way he talks e.g. in meetings and conversations.

"Then I suddenly take in that – oi, now I could have behaved differently or I could have used a different formulation, but now I am just talking the way I always would have done and this might not be what leads me where I want to go. So I feel that I have awareness about language that is a bit bigger. That I think things through before I say them, and might be more occupied with how I express myself."

Dennis also mentions being present to yourself and how it enables him to stand in discussions:

"That how you say things are more important than anything else, for instance, and to… to be present enough to yourself to manage to make sure that you are not put out. That you manage to continue the discussion even though the attacks come from another place than you expected…"

Caroline frames it slightly different and talks about keeping ground contact

"I think that…that the understanding I have about myself has to do with how safe I can feel and how much I can give of myself and how I am able to stand in different situations, and I think that OK, now I am in this situation and what is going on now… It has something to do with ground contact and taking root and…yes." She says that this knowing herself enables her to stand steady. *"Well, because if there's a conflict, or something you have to do (…) then if I have an understanding of who I am and how I want to be and how I want to appear, then I can stand quite steady no matter if the wind blows or anything – and it always will. It can be windy, but then you get up and you know that this is me, I am standing here. And this was a success and this wasn't, but that is how it is."*

Dennis elaborates on the connection between your inner feelings and your actions, and the effect this might have on others. This also relates to the category called Authenticity, but I wanted to include it here, because he points so directly to the overlap between these two concepts. *"But it really is very important to be aware of how your actions affect others and that …eh…might be the most important thing to be aware of. But I don't think you can be that without being aware of your own feelings and reactions. So that is the first step… but what is first and what is last?"*

Brian says that he wants to try and understand how he is perceived by others.
"To me the most important thing is to try and understand how I am perceived by those around me. That I try to interpret…or get feed back and hear how they see… how I behave and who I am as a person is important for what we manage to do in the section (…) I must try to be very attentive to how I affect other people."
Caroline points to the part about knowing yourself in a more external way, but still keeping the contact to her values:
"To me it means that I have an overview and concept of how I behave physically, how I think, how I treat people. That is, how I think in relation to who I am, what is important to me and what values do I have."

4.3.2. Deep personal process

This category emerged as I realized that the participants in different ways expressed that the course had offered them a possibility to use theory as a basis for a personal process. The feedback from the 360 survey of course makes it quite personal, but also the other tools that were used were important. The informants' comments indicated that a bridge had been made between theory and practice. By using their own concrete experiences from their work life the participants expresses that they see the relevance of the theory, and understand it at a deeper and more personal level. They frame this in different ways. Anna says about one of the exercises:
"So it wasn't anything superficial, I had to really sit down and think it through." In relation to an issue that shows up, which she had known about earlier she says: *"I found out that I had to dive deep into myself and really investigate and I have succeeded better through this...through this 4 column-exercise among other things, and the course."* About the 4 column exercise she says: *"I really learned a lot from that. I got a lot of... I became aware of a lot inside of me."* And finally she

also states: *"And the part about seeing myself a little more objectively in the situations I am working with. I have become more aware of that through this."*

Caroline says: *"So the thing about getting a kind of deeper understanding about who you are, I find important in relation to the circle* (360 feedback). *Interesting to go into the circle and…you know… reflect upon what I have answered and what others have answered and where there is coherence and where there are gaps."* She expresses how the course has made her think deeper about herself: *"You have to sit down and reflect and think, like a little deeper and… self awareness and understanding of yourself. In a way - take in how I perceive me, and how others perceive me."*

It seems that especially the 360 feedback has made this a deep personal process to Dennis: *"With everything else you learn, you hear that this is the theory behind it, and then you take in what you want and include whatever you remember, and then you just don't give a damn about the rest. At least that is how I work. But this was in a way… We can't not give a damn about this! (…) It is people I like who have answered. And me, not least."* He compares it with another course he participated in. *"While this –in a completely different way – brings people into the processes that take place in their own brain or body or wherever it is you are thinking."*

Brian says that he has experienced the course as having a new way of thinking, and says that the 360 feedback has been a very concrete tool in bringing together theory and practice: *"But also the fact that you do a 360 evaluation... it does so that you are forced into a…what do you call it…or that you must translate theory to practice – to actual action."* He was also encouraged by the connection to the work place, and the fact that his colleagues are involved: *"So I can no longer just walk around thinking it to myself. I have in a way involved others in it and that makes it more binding. And I think that is a good thing."*

4.3.3. Authenticity

This category emerged partly from the answers the participants gave when I asked them to comment on a statement from Scharmer (see interview guide, appendix 3), and partly from the rest of the interviews. This category points to the importance of a leader being congruent or authentic. Thus the informants mention how your values are shown in your actions, and that what you do must

be in line with what you are feeling inside. Some of the statements in this category also point to awareness as a part of being authentic, and I will discuss this connection further in the next chapter.

Dennis says: *"When I do something because I know that someone else thinks it is right, then I don't feel the same as when… I haven't felt that I got the same out of it as if I did it because I think it is right…"* He also uses an example about doing appraisal interviews. This can be done in a fairly "technical" way with standard things you *have to* go through, while "*a leader who is aware of the importance of this and thinks that you are important in your job…he would get a completely different benefit of having the conversation, I would say."*

Awareness and authenticity are closely linked, and I think this sentence from Dennis shows how they interact with each other:
"What are you feeling right now and… keeping that in mind all the time. But now I found out that it is not only about what you are feeling right now, but also about how you react in actions. That is, how your feelings are expressed through behaviour - that is also about awareness."

Through the 360 Brian got feedback that told him that he was perceived as being a bit "invisible." He describes how he realized that this is a process of becoming clearer about his opinions – both to himself and to others.
"So it might be that….I might have to be even more so that I mark that this is important to me and I will stand for this. So that it is made clear to me and the organization that this is important to me, and that I am going to work more on this." It seems that Brian wants to work towards being more authentic. In extension to the above he says: *"I have probably in some situations just been wanting to move on, and then I back down…well, well, that's fine, and then we can move on. But then it can be re-plays about it, and it really isn't as quick a solution as you thought."*

Brian mentions how he often has to deal with different rules and regulations in e.g. The Working Environment Act, and says that often times he gets the impression that people are just following it because they have to, and that it often makes the result half-hearted and negative. He, on the contrary, has decided that he wants to try and agree and to use the mechanisms in the law in a positive way. And he says *"Then I actually start believing it and that might lead to a more sensible reflection around it."*

The first thing that comes to Anna's mind when she hears the sentence by Scharmer also points to congruence: *"it is not only what you say, but how you say it. That is what matters."* She also talks about values: *"I have some thoughts and values inside me that makes me act the way I do."* When I ask her if she thinks that people around her see these values in her way of being a leader she says: *"Yes, I am convinced about that."*

4.3.4. Surprises that led to discoveries

This category started to emerge quite early in the research process, and is based on my observations from the classroom and statements from the interviewees. Through the 360 degree survey the participants got feedback about them selves that might not be what they expected, and in some ways were surprising to them. These surprises or unexpected elements seem to contain a potential for the participants to make new discoveries about them selves.

During my observations in class I saw how some of the participants got surprised when they got their results from the 360. The tension in the room was high as people looked through their results, and the reactions varied. To some it might not have been a surprise, and others seemed very surprised. Some looked confused, some laughed, some were very silent and some left the room. After they got their results they all had a small coaching session with one of the facilitators, and later they worked more on understanding the feedback. The different degrees of surprise were also reflected in the interviews. Dennis was probably the one that was most surprised by his feedback and spent a lot of time figuring out what this meant. In the interview Dennis describes this: *"And then I get back that leadership-thing and you were there too, and then I see that "oh my God – this hurts!" and this is a person that I absolutely don't want to be.* [Explains about his results] *The behaviour that I connect to these personality traits, that is a person that I absolutely don't want to be. It was…it came all out of the blue… I really hoped I wasn't behaving in that way. And there were a couple of days when I didn't understand what this was. It really was a punch."* After a while Dennis starts recognizing the behaviour and became able to reflect on what this meant to him: *"Yes, that was the good part of it. That after that, I started to notice the reactions, at what times I felt… oi, now I felt attacked in a way, and what I then did when I felt attacked. And then I noticed that... I noticed that I had a tendency to just pull out of the whole thing."* He finishes that

part of the interview by saying: *"Now I see it all the time!"* About the same issue he later says: *"It really is strange that I never did it before, I think."*

Anna also gets surprised by some of the feedback she got. She was evaluated to be quite high on "autocratic" behaviour, and this puzzled her. Here she describes how she dealt with it:
"and then I took in some observers who…who had evaluated me and talked a bit with them about how they had evaluated me, and that I would like to work more on it, because I don't want to be autocratic and wanted to try and find a more adequate behaviour. And then… we talked about it and I got examples on how I might get perceived as autocratic. And then I realized it. Then I realized it!" This gave her an opportunity to change the behaviour, if she thinks it is necessary, or to keep on being autocratic if that is what she wants.

Brian has a slightly different way of framing it. He says that the issues that came up through the feedback were things that he in some way knew before, but had not done anything with. He says:
"It is a paradox that a lot of the things that came up I really already knew. But I might not have been good enough at transferring it from knowing about it to doing something about it."
He concludes by saying:*" So I ought to have done something about it earlier."* E.g. he was scored to be "ambitious" and at first he did not recognize that. But he saw it after having looked deeper into what it meant: *"I probably have some expectations to myself and to the department about high delivery, and these expectations might be more visible than I realized."* Through the feedback he got an outside perspective on himself, which enabled him to discover sides of himself that he earlier was less aware of.

Caroline did not say anything concrete about what surprised her, but she talks about how the gaps between her way of perceiving herself and other's way of perceiving her can give her clues about what to work more on: *"So of course, when I look at what that group answered, there are gaps compared to the other group, and I find that very interesting, because how do I continue to work on that?"* She wants to do more of the things that created positive feedback.
"And then I can use the thing about mentoring, guidance that I get positive feedback on. I think that, ok, cultivate that to get it to work. But that thing about going all down and all terrible about the result, I won't be bothered to do that." Her approach is more about doing something about it:

"No, I really don't want to spend a lot of energy on that. But the gap in it self, of course I take it in. And do something about it – action!"

4.3.5. Challenges for reflection

One of my presumptions before I started this work was that reflection is needed to become more aware of yourself, and during the interviews we talked about reflection. Especially Brian brought to my attention that leaders are navigating in a world where a lot of action is required of them and this might sometimes limit the time and resources they have to deal with their own personal processes and to reflect. It was mainly Brian who mentioned this directly, but I chose to include it as a category anyway, because it seems to be important to consider if there is a contradiction between being busy on one hand and going deeper into reflecting processes, and how this might be transcended. During my observations in the course I also got the impression that more people had difficulty in applying what they learned to their everyday work.

Brian talks about how he feels that he stays on the surface of things:

"Well, it is about taking time to find...find...the ground level in what you… because the problem with the juggling we do when we have a lot to do is that you in a way…you stay on the surface. I notice that when I have one of those weeks when you know like…bang – bang – bang! Thousands of things are going on: studying, work, cooking dinner, you're going on this and you're going on that. All the time you are like…lying on the surface and you can't find that…calmness. You are not in balance, simply. And that is when…(…) in stead of, like going into depth and take it in and stay in the situation for a while – then it's more like ok, we'll do it like this, then we are done and I have like forgotten it. But maybe I ought to have taken the time to… stand in the situation and reflect more upon it. Go more into depth with these situations."

He thinks that he spends time on reflecting on his actions, but says that maybe he ought to have spent more time reflecting on his feelings.

"I have more doubts about the feeling-side…I do... I must admit that I have more doubts about if I am in touch with…constantly what I am actually feeling in relation to these situations. Because I have a tendency to…everything goes so damn fast (…) So that often before you have the time to sit down and maybe really reflect on these things then –bang- you're in the next task. So that…often I think back and think that this was really complicated matters and maybe I ought to have spent more

time reflecting on. But at the same time it can be helpful that you don't get too deep into the substance. It does that you in a way manage to take care of the other things that are required."
He highlights a dilemma between the requirements for actions, decisions and completion of tasks on one hand and reflection and awareness on the other. This issue is reflected by Caroline by using a triangle as a picture: *"To me it is like stepping out of the situation and look at things that are going on and put some words on it – alone or with others. What is going on now? When we are doing this and this? Like a triangle, you know, with an action-perspective and then reflection on top. Because it is often like "planning – action – planning – action" and then you don't get to the top-part of the triangle, which is reflection."*

Anna talks about how she is practicing the balance between action and reflection:
 "And it can be some situations where it for instance is a little like...eh… not completely ok, and then I feel that now I have to sense how do I react to this not being ok. And at the same time things have to go on, like… there is a job to be done, but that I kind of sense there and then - how do I feel? How am I reacting to this?"

After having presented the empirical data on which I base my research I will now move on to the discussion part, starting with the discussion of the categories one by one in the light of theoretical perspectives.

5. Discussion of categories

In this chapter I will discuss each category that emerged from the analysis by relating it to the theory explored in chapter 2. The categories are linked with and overlap each other, but in this chapter I will discuss them separately to draw attention to specific points in each.

5.1. Discussion of Being aware of yourself

My starting point for this thesis was to inquire about self awareness, and that made it a natural focus in the interviews too. The data from the interviews gave me new perspectives on this awareness and insight into how the participants experienced it. I chose this category to be the core category because I think it relates to all the other categories and that the Norwegian expression *"å kjenne seg selv"* was in some way represented in all the categories.

The notion of being aware of yourself can be said to be a very subjective and subtle thing, and the informants described it in different ways, with emphasis on different aspects. They describe how awareness can be focused on different aspects of our being. Some examples of what they become aware of in themselves are: *"appearance," "actions," "physical behaviour," "behaviour," "formulations," "language," "how I express myself," "reactions," "feelings," "what is going on inside of me," "how I think," "how I treat people," "what is important to me" and "values."*

According to Joiner & Josephs (2007) the quality of self-awareness evolves each time you move to a new stage in your development as a leader. The fact that the informants focus on different aspects of what and how they are aware, might indicate that they are operating at different levels of leadership agility. Joiner & Josephs (2007) describe how leaders who operate on the post-heroic levels are able to reflect and be aware more "in the moment" than those at heroic levels. They have a better capacity for handling e.g. painful feelings and understanding other peoples' perspectives due to this more developed awareness. This awareness in the moment is described by Anna. She talks about how she – here and now – tries to have an awareness of both what is going on inside her, and what is going on around her. I think this points to her being able to operate in at least some incidents from a post-heroic level of Leadership Agility (Joiner & Josephs, 2002).

I think that Caroline's statements point to a slightly different way of being aware. She talks about how her knowing herself enables her to stand steady and keep grounded. It seems that she has a

strong image of who she is and wants to be, which enables her to feel safe about herself in turbulent situations. This difference in nuance between Caroline and Anna's statements was one of the reasons why I got to think about the notion "å kjenne seg selv" and the two implicit meanings that lay within this. I think Anna's statements points to "sensing yourself"- being aware of what goes on inside you and keeping in touch with that. Caroline's statements point more at the part about "knowing myself," in the sense of having a picture and an overview at a more general level about who I am, my opinions and my worth. This distinction is subtle, and hard to make, but I think it point to a difference in how open we are to become aware of new things in ourselves. If Caroline's picture of who she is or wants to be is too firm it might prevent her from being able to see beyond these assumptions or make them objects of her attention.

Jordan (2002) elaborates on Kegan's theory and says that the process against becoming aware starts with the act of *noticing* the processes that takes place in our consciousness. To get a deep sense of self awareness we have to be open and willing to really examine what is going on, which means we have to take a different perspective on ourselves than we normally do. This is explained by Torbert et al. (2004) as super-vision, which points to the ability to reflect *in the moment* on both internal and external factors. It takes intentional practice to attain this ability and we probably all recognize the experience of not realizing our feelings about a situation until long after.

Brian talks about how he wants to understand how others perceive him, which I also think relates to getting to know yourself better, or becoming aware of your own behaviour. This points to the meeting point between how he looks at himself and how others look at him. Getting to know how he is perceived by others might help Brian to notice ego processes that he has not earlier been aware of. I think this also has to do with suspending, or as Scharmer (2009) put it "seeing with fresh eyes." By taking in other people's point of view and letting them meet with your own you get a broader picture, and I think you get the chance of becoming more aware.

5.2. Discussion of Deep Personal Process

The informants had the experience that this course had elements that helped them to get a bit deeper into their own personal process. As I see it several of the tools and methods that were used in the course aimed at challenging the assumptions the participants carried with them. We all hold beliefs and perceptions about our selves, which may or may not be true. According to Scharmer (2009)

these assumptions and beliefs are often based on what he calls *downloading*. Thus we are continually reconfirming our habitual judgements and reproducing old patterns of thought. I think some of the purpose of the course was to assist the participants in going beyond this downloading. The statements in this category indicate that the participants have experienced something that went beyond their downloading mode and engaged them at a deeper level.

Suspension is often mentioned as a way of taking a close look at e.g. your assumptions and through that getting a bit deeper (Depraz et al 2003, Scharmer 2009, Bohm et al. 1991). Participating in the course seems to have given the informants this possibility to *slow down* to explore and discover things about themselves that often can be overlooked in the usual trot. In the course we did an exercise that I think illustrated suspension. All the participants had to get up from their chairs and stand near the blackboard and imagine that they were standing on a balcony. From there they were asked to imagine that they looked at them selves as if they were still sitting in their chairs, thus looking at themselves from an outside perspective. At first it seemed that people had difficulty in understanding why they had to do this, but during the course a metaphor of "getting up on the balcony" began to take root among the participants. This focus on suspension has probably contributed to the experience of the course as having been a deep process.

Depraz et al. (2003) mention three different ways suspension can be triggered, which are: an external event, someone else tells you to suspend, you tell yourself to suspend. It seemed that both Dennis and Anna were almost shocked by some of the feedback and thus suspended their former way of seeing themselves. To them this external event shook their view of themselves in a way that – at first – made them feel bad and then made them want to dive deeper into it and find out what this actually meant for them. Kegan and Lahey (2009) point to the importance of help from others to challenge our worldview. They say that just telling other people about what it is we wish to change gives us a better chance of succeeding. This might also have happened in the course through the use of 360 degree feedback and through working in small groups. Brian mentions that the fact that his colleagues were involved made the impact of the course more important to him, more binding. Dennis points to the fact that the feedback comes from people he likes, which makes it important to him. Caroline also articulates how the feedback from others makes her go deeper into herself.

Suspension marks a first step towards being able to take as object what we have earlier been subject to. We are slowly beginning to *notice* (Jordan, 2002) that that we have certain patterns of e.g. behaviour, assumptions or thought. The next category, *Discoveries,* gets closer to that.

5.3. Discussion of Surprises that led to discoveries

Throughout the course I saw people getting surprised by both the feedback they got, and also by some of the other things that they experienced. To some these surprises led to discoveries about themselves. According to Grendstad (1986) to discover something is to become aware of something that has been there all along. This is illustrated clearly through Dennis' example of when he gets the 360 feedback. He says that he was surprised that he did not see it before. He realized that he had a certain pattern of behaviour and became aware of the fact that it might prevent him from being who he wanted to be. This relates to what Jordan (2002) calls *noticing*. When we notice – or discover - something about ourselves – e.g. a behavioural pattern – we are able to begin a process towards being able to evaluate it, make decisions about it and to gain awareness of how it affects us. Kvalsund (Allgood " Kvalsund, 2005) also mentions that when others are involved in these discoveries about us – e.g. by pointing to something that we did not realize before – we get a choice: we can accept it as being a part of us, or we can discover something slightly different – that I do not want to be as others have defined me, and I can begin a process of changing. It seemed that this shift happened to Anna, when she realized what her co-workers meant when they characterized her as being autocratic. When she says *"and then I realized it. Then I realized it!"* it seems to express genuine discovery. This opens a possibility for her to take these behavioural patterns as object and be able to make choices about them. In Kegan's words (1982, 1994) she can have the behavioural patterns instead of being had by them. It does not necessarily mean that she has to change them, but she can become aware of them.

Brian also had the experience of *dis-covering* something that he said he really knew before, but had not reacted on. To me this brings up a question about whether the feedback has to in some way feel "close to you" for you to actually learn something from it? Is it so that if the gap between how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you is too big it is more likely to create resistance in you than to actually create a willingness to reflect upon it and maybe change? I will not inquire further into this here, but keep it as open questions.

Caroline was quite clear about that she did not necessarily want to change because of the feedback, and this shows a different way of handling the feedback. There can be several reasons for that and making discoveries can also be a threatening emotional experience, because it might involve letting go of your old perception of something (Grendstad 1986, Mezirow, 2000). Also, discovering is subjective (Allgood & Kvalsund, 2005) and it might take time to see and make meaning out of something even though others point to it. The 360 feedback and the course in general is a starting point, and might also lead Caroline to discoveries on a longer time scale. Caroline appears through her statements to be more oriented towards taking action than to reflect a lot about the feedback she got.

5.4. Discussion of Authenticity

Being authentic was described as important to the informants. The fact that what you do or show on the outside is in line with how you feel on the inside is vital for your way of making relations to other people, but also to yourself. Kets De Vries (2006) says that people that are out of touch with their own inner world feel continuously more alienated and unreal. They will present a "false" image of who they are. We probably all recognize how it is to have a strong feeling that people we meet, say or do things that do not have this "root" in themselves. This subtle feeling can create mistrust from others and distress in the person himself because he is suppressing who he really is and how he really feels. Dennis' example of doing an appraisal interview with different "agendas" is an example of this. If leaders do not feel that they do things for a reason that they can stand for, it can have an effect on what they get out of it and people will probably sense it and might loose confidence (Kets de Vries, 2006). This putting on a façade may be perceived as an advantage, because it makes it easier to conform to norms and what is expected, but both Rogers (1961) and Kets de Vries (2006) strongly advise against it. Creating relationships characterized by trust and sincerity can not be done through in-authenticity, and this is also expressed by the informants.

Brian's example of being perceived as "invisible" made him want to be clearer about what is important to him. This might indicate that he in some matters has been in-authentic and people around him felt that they did not know where they had him. Through the feedback he became aware of this and now wants to work on it. This shows how people notice the in-authenticity in a person, and how it can affect the setting he is working in. Brian has not necessarily been aware of his putting aside his own opinions, and it is hard to say how crucial this was to him. But according to

Kets de Vries (2006) this can build up over years and might make people feel unintegrated and depersonalized.

Awareness and authenticity are closely linked, and I do not intend to do a comprehensive distinction here. As I have tried to picture it here one of the differences is that authenticity is slightly more about how you express what it is you are aware of. Awareness involves your attention to all parts of your self – your bodily senses, your feelings, what goes on inside you. You might say that awareness is a prerequisite for being authentic. Dennis points to this when he says that *"now I found out that it is not only about what you are feeling right now, but also about how you react in actions."* This shows how the ideas, values and feelings, might not be in line with what he is actually doing or showing on the outside. Argyris (1990) makes a distinction between *"espoused theories"* and *"theories-in-use,"* and says that these gaps between what we say we do and what we actually do holds a potential for creative change. To learn from the gap between my espoused theory and my current behaviour – that is my theory-in-use - I have to recognize that there *is* a gap. Anna points to this as she talks about how she has a clear set of values that lies as a base in her, and which she tries to live by. She is quite sure that these shine through to people around her. But as Argyris (1990) asserts we might need others to help us see our theories-in-use, because despite good intentions we might not be perceived by others as we imagine we would be. I think the 360 feedback holds a potential in this process of exploring our own authenticity as we get a picture of how others perceive us.

5.5. Discussion of Challenges for Reflection

Especially Brian points to one of the big challenges about reflection, which is the lack of time. What he describes – and what I believe is a general trait – is that leaders are faced with the requirement for making decisions, taking action, having an overview, attending meetings and in general having a lot to do. He says that these busy periods give him a feeling of *"lying on the surface,"* and not being *"in balance,"* This seems to point to a perceived contrast between acting and reflecting, which I want to inquire a bit more about here.

It seems that Brian assumes that reflection takes time and you have to sit down and think things through. This is what Schön (2001) calls *reflection-on-action*. Thus we reflect *on* a situation after it has happened. A course like this one can be an arena for doing this, or it might be done at work. By

doing this we can explore a situation further after it has taken place, and this gives us experience to handle new situations in a more adequate way. Schön also refers to *reflection-in-action* which takes place while the situation is unfolding. During this kind of reflection we make use of what has gone before – our experience and what we got out of doing reflection-on-action. Thus through experimenting with reflection we can develop our way of reflecting, and it does not necessarily have to take a lot of time. According to Joiner & Josephs (2002) this ability to reflect develops as you develop to higher stages of Leadership Agility. You might say that the distance between reflection and action diminishes. Joiner & Josephs (2002) says that at its core, Leadership Agility is about *"stepping back from your current focus to gain new insight and make wiser decisions, then engage in what needs to be done next"* (p. 212).

Caroline describes how we forget the "top of the triangle," which is reflection. The demands for planning and taking action seem to take so much time that there is limited time for doing reflection-on-action. One might assert that this also makes the demand for reflection-in-action bigger. That in a busy world, where things are constantly changing the need for being able to reflect in the moment increases. Scharmer (2009) contributes with a new perspective on reflection. He says that in a rapidly changing world it is not enough to learn from the past by reflecting on what already has happened. He elaborates on a concept of *"learning from the future as it emerges,"* which implies that we have to go beyond previously known ways of reflecting. To do this we have to enter the state of *presencing* which implies that we let go of old patterns and open up to see the new possibilities that lie ahead of us. This is a subtle phenomenon, but has to do with being fully aware and daring to go with what appears right in a more intuitive way that are not limited by habitual patterns of the past.

6. Summarizing discussion

Taking apart the data material and dividing it into categories has made it possible to get an overview and analyze more closely what I think has been expressed in the interviews by linking it with theory. In this last part I will focus on creating a bigger picture again and link the categories with elements from my observations and theory.

Through the interviews I got a picture of how the informants perceive self awareness and what it means to them, and I also got an impression of how they have experienced participating in the course. This resulted in the categories "Deep personal process," "Authenticity," "Surprises that led to Discoveries," "Challenges for reflection" and the core category "Being aware of yourself." When I looked at this and tried to put it together with my observations a pattern emerged for me. In some ways I saw the process of the course following the U-movement that Scharmer describes in his book "Theory U" (2009). This inspired me to use the U to put together what I found in the interviews and my observations and use the U as a starting point to inquire further into how these processes can support personal growth in leaders and as a part of that their development of self-awareness. This is what I intend to do here, and I have structured it as a journey through the U process. I am aware that this way of using the U might make it appear static and stage-like, which does not fully grasp the depth and dynamic of the theory. I have chosen to do this as a way of experimenting with how the U process can be used to create a frame work for describing what happens in processes.

6.1. Looking through the lenses of the U

Scharmer (2009) depicts the U in different ways with different focal points, but here I will focus on the parts depicted in chapter 2. I am aware that the complexity of this theory is not contained in this, but I choose to use just this part of the U for this purpose.

6.1.1. The opening process at the left side of the U

Downloading is the starting point of the U. When the participants entered the course they probably had an idea about how they saw themselves and how others saw them, which probably was based on past experiences and reproduction of certain assumptions about the world. This is what Scharmer (2009) calls downloading. One of the aims of the course was to help people look beyond these usual patterns and get new perspectives on themselves. When your way of perceiving yourself is

dominated by downloading you are – in Kegan's terminology - *subject to* a habitual pattern of thought. What the informants describe in the category called *"Challenges for reflection"* looks like a pattern characterized by downloading. Being forced to make fast decisions, take action, get things done gives Brian a feeling of staying on the surface of things and probably act the way he always does. In the course the participants were offered different opportunities to experiment with suspending these habitual thoughts, which points to the next step in the U-process, Suspension (Scharmer, 2009).

Suspension implies seeing with fresh eyes and wondering. This suspension was e.g. made possible through the 360 feedback. I saw this happening in the course. When people got their feed back they were asked to just sit with it for a while and try not to analyze or explain it, but instead just take it in. While this went on I was just sitting in the room and looked at all the different reactions. Some sat in silence, reading, turning papers, looking up and down. Some laughed, talked and asked each other questions. Others left the room. Some looked frustrated, scratching their heads with wrinkles of confusion between their eyes. The tension in the room was almost palpable as people tried to figure out what this meant. All day there had been an atmosphere of anticipation to get the results and it seemed like there was a shift now – like a tension had been released and something new was appearing. To me this indicated a move to "Suspending" in the U. The participants got a chance to suspend their own views of themselves by getting the evaluation. The feedback offered them an opportunity of seeing new perspectives on themselves, seeing with fresh eyes and opening their minds to see things differently.

I think this move to suspension relates to what Jordan (2002) calls *noticing*. When you see with fresh eyes you can begin to notice what you were earlier subject to, and take it as object of attention. Thus it can be described as the first step towards self awareness. At the "check in" on the third day of the course I noticed that a number of the participants expressed that they had become more *aware* of themselves through the feedback, and this might show that they had started a move away from downloading.

Moving from downloading to suspension will of course be a different process depending on who you are and how you relate to the feedback you get. To a person who makes meaning on the 3rd level of consciousness (Kegan, 1982, 1994) the feedback can be hard to handle, because he mainly

relies on external validation and preserving connections to people around him. At this level of consciousness it is likely that he either identifies very strongly with the feedback and takes it as a personal attack, or that he does not identify with it at all and does not take in any of it. Neither of these reactions are particular helpful for further development. What is needed is an ability to take the feedback as object, to dis-identify with it and thereby be able to make decisions about it.

If the person, on the other hand, operates at the 4th or 5th level of consciousness the feedback is more likely to be viewed as just another perspective on him, from which he can learn and grow. The feedback will not be as likely to be taken as a personal critique for a person at these levels.

Thus suspension might be more challenging for some than others, and I also think that some might not really have moved even this far. During the course some of the participants said that they had spend several days digesting the results, others went through a phase of denial and blaming the assessment tool while others were very surprised and some almost sad. I think that the participants took in as much as they were able to at that time. As one of the facilitators said before the results were handed out *"You will get out of it what you put into it. So the deeper you dare to reflect, the more you will get out of it."*

After a while they got time with one of the facilitators for coaching and initial exploration of what the feedback meant for them, and this initiated the step of redirection in the U-process (Scharmer, 2009). Redirection implies seeing yourself as a part of a bigger whole. In stead of trying to fix what we think is wrong we turn our attention to looking at the system as a whole. This happened when the participants were introduced to different exercises where they were given a chance to inquire more into what the results meant to them and how they could see their own role. I think this relates to Jordan's (2002) second step against self awareness, which he calls *interpreting/evaluating*. Here the objectification continues and we try to find out what it means to us.

The bottom of the U is *presencing*, which is essential in Theory U. Presencing is a turning point, where we begin to see what it is that has brought us here, and we start to realize opportunities that lie ahead. In the interviews the category *"Being aware of yourself"* illustrates how this can mean a shift in what you do if you suddenly become aware of something inside you in a situation. The feedback and the exercises might have made the participants aware of patterns and assumptions that held an opportunity for them to make changes and discover new paths to follow in the future. I

think that especially the category "*Surprises that led to Discoveries*" illustrates this. The participants here realize something about themselves, and they look into a future where they will have a chance to grow from the insight they have had. Scharmer (2009) says that presencing is often characterized by a moment of silence, which I also experienced in the course. Both when going through the four column exercise and when having received the feedback people seemed to be in this state of silence – both literally and in more figurative ways.

This subtle experience is hard to pinpoint and only the people who were there can say if it actually happened, but during the course it seemed like some had this feeling of presencing, even though it was hard to observe. It seemed like doors opened in their minds, like they connected to a deeper understanding of what had been and what might lie ahead and just stayed with that for a while. Maybe they were looking at the possibility to "learn from the future as it emerges" as Scharmer expresses it.

If I link presencing with Jordan's steps (2002) towards self awareness I would say that as we experience presencing we are entering the third step he describes, which is *transforming*. By intentionally relating to what has appeared before us in the previous steps we can begin to transform or change what we have become aware of. This process of transforming goes on all the way through the ascent on the right side of the U.

6.1.2. Towards acting at the right side of the U

Once beyond this turning point you begin the ascent of the right side of the U, where the attention is turned more towards action. The elements of the right side of the U are Crystallizing, Prototyping and Performing. Scharmer (2009) emphasizes the importance of maintaining the focus on presencing throughout the right side of the U, but moving forward at the same time.

For the time between the 2nd and the 3rd gathering the participants had to work on making an action plan concerning an area that they would like to work on. Based on their experiences in class – their results and what they discovered through exercises – they had to start envisioning how they would like to actually move on from what they had connected to and experienced as meaningful. This envisioning is what Scharmer calls Crystallizing.

The process of Prototyping also started between the gatherings when the participants had to experiment and learn from experience by actually doing what they had in their action plan. *"Prototyping allows fast-cycle feedback learning and adaption"* (Scharmer, 2009, p. 203) and to the participants this implied the possibility to enter a metaphorical dialogue with their context and to reflect upon the answers they got through trying out things. This process is depending on the participants' will to keep connecting to what they experienced going through the U and also on how the contexts they are situated in accept their attempts to do new things.

Performing is about bringing things to a macro level and still acting personally (Scharmer, 2009). It brings attention to institutional levels and this is what happens after the participants finished the course. Performing is about how the participants bring their new learning and experiences out in a larger system – primarily their own workplaces. It is about implementing what they have learned into everyday practices and keep on refining what they do. This will be an act of balancing between keeping the connection to what was realized during the U-process (that is the course) and trying not to get stuck in a new pattern – which will then mean returning to downloading. My impression from the observation and the interviews was that some participants made new discoveries about themselves and their organizations and were eager to try and initiate changes on organizational levels too.

6.2. Concluding thoughts

Through doing a case study of a course on Leadership Development and Organizational Transformation I have in this thesis inquired about how a course like this can support participants' development of self awareness.

By using the U as a model I have shown how the process of the course can be depicted and related to the categories that emerged from the interviews. It seems that the course contained elements that have contributed to an opening process, which have provided possibilities for developing self awareness. As I have shown, the steps in the U process has links to what Jordan describes as steps to becoming aware – noticing, interpreting/evaluating and transforming. Through the interviews with the participants I found that they have experienced elements from this process, and thus I find it reasonable to say that the course did provide a possibility for the participants to develop self

awareness. Whether the participants actually experience that their self awareness is heightened must be considered an individual matter.

An important issue to consider when designing and conducting a course like this is how people make meaning at different levels. How the facilitators approach this issue is crucial to help increase the possibility for people to get a positive experience with a course which has elements of transformational learning. If the facilitators are not sensitive towards the level of consciousness that each student is at there is a big risk that they will teach in a way that will make some students feel "in over their heads." Thus it is important that the facilitators consider not only where they want the student to *go*, but also where the students *are* when it comes to level of consciousness (Kegan in Mezirow, 2000). For example, the 360 feedback is a tool that needs proper debriefing and follow-up. It is supposed to challenge people's world view and assumptions, and can thus be tough to go through. Without proper debriefing there is a risk that you will be left with a very bad feeling and blame yourself, especially if you primarily operate from the socialized mind where you rely a lot on the opinion of others to shape your picture of yourself. The facilitators have to accept that it can be very demanding – and probably also unexpected - for some to be faced with different views on yourself and the world. Thus people will experience the course differently and some might not have the feeling of having gone through anything similar to the U process, or might not have gone very deep into it. As a facilitator an important task is thus to be able to create a holding environment, where each individual can feel safe, accepted and supported to deal with the challenges they face (Kegan in Mezirow, 2000).

To facilitate these personal processes is thus a demanding task, and my purpose here is not to evaluate whether this was a success in this particular course, but rather to point to the complexity you are faced with as a facilitator. What I did find was that the informants experienced the course as focusing on personal processes, that their world views were challenged and that some discovered new things about themselves. I also found that the course contains elements and uses tools that hold the potential for helping participants to develop self awareness, and that whether or not this development happens is individual and among other things relies on the developmental level of the individual participant.

6.3. Implications for further research

In this thesis I have only touched the surface of a profound and complex field which focuses on the personal dimension of being a leader, and many other aspects can be explored.

It would be interesting to inquire more into how self awareness can be developed and supported through individual coaching. I think that a coach could be a good partner to a leader who wanted to keep on challenging his view of himself and work on becoming more self aware, but how is this experienced by the leaders? And what would be important elements in such coaching processes?

What other factors might support the development of self awareness? Meditation and spiritual practice are mentioned as factors that might help you to increase self awareness and to have success as a leader (Dagens Næringsliv, 2009, Joiner & Josephs, 2007), and it would be interesting to explore this further.

Another thing that caught my attention during this work was the cultural dimension of this kind of work. My experience is that these thoughts about awareness, consciousness, connecting to your inner source and so on are in Norway perceived as typically American, and that many Norwegians have a slightly more pragmatic view on what makes for good leadership. It would be interesting to inquire more into how some of this work can be translated – both linguistic and culturally – to make more sense to people in Norway. I think that we are missing a language for many of these processes and concepts, and that this influences the understanding of it.

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Appendix 1

Trondheim januar 2009.

Forespørsel om deltakelse i masterprosjekt

Mitt navn er Sine Bjerregård Hanssen og jeg er masterstudent i Rådgivning ved Pedagogisk Institut ved NTNU. Jeg skal skrive masteroppgave om ledere og personlig utvikling.

Min veileder på prosjektet er Jonathan Reams fra Pedagogisk Institut. Problemstilling og metodevalg er drøftet med ham og godkjennt av ham.

Datamaterialet til denne masteroppgave ønsker jeg å innhente gjennom intervju og observasjon av kurs i ledelsesutvikling og organisasjonsendring ved NTNUVidere. Jeg ønsker derfor ditt samtykke til følgende:

- at du deltar i et introduksjonsintervju ved kursets start
- at jeg observerer og evt. stiller spørsmål til deg underveis i kurset
- at jeg gjør et længere intervju (cirka en time) ved kursets avslutning
- at jeg tar opp intervjuene på diktafon
- at datamaterialet kan bli analysert og brukt i masteroppgaven
- at jeg får adgang til din feedback fra 360-graders testen

Når datamaterialet er transkribert vil du få mulighet til å kommentere og komme med rettelser til materialet før jeg analyserer det. I den ferdige rapporten kan det bli aktuelt å sitere deg eller gi en beskrivelse av en situasjon.

Alle opplysninger, som kommer frem vil bli anonymisert og din arbeidsplass vil ikke bli nevnt. Alle data (intervjuopptak og obervasjonsnotater) vil bli slettet etter at master-prosjektet er avsluttet.

Du kan på et hvilket som helst tidspunkt trekke deg fra prosjektet ved å si fra til meg, og jeg er tilgjengelig for kontakt ved spørsmål eller lignende underveis i forløpet.

Med vennlig hilsen Sine Bjerregård Hanssen

Jeg har lest ovenstående og innvilger i å delta

Deltakers underskrift

Appendix 2

Dag 2 Observation	Notes
Morning Intro - check in - en ny person - alle fortæller hvem der. ① Creating a container - help us understand our own inner workings. We'll get out of it what we put into it. So - the deeper we dare to reflect, the more we'll get out of it. _Opgave_ FR: Anchor yourself in the physical place you're in - look at who's around you - Alle op til tavlen - look at yourself from the outside - imagine on a balcony - looking down _____ ② Role Play exercise Groups - prepare an interview with different "Ed's" (→ Leadership Ag.) Expert Achiever Catalyst Groups ~~present~~ are interviewed as Ed. Comments: Focus on the negative sides of the levels. One said "Are there any good sides?". ↳ Achiever - lacks longterm strategy ↳ talked a lot about strategy ↳ "All the Eds are used, but in different situations" "Hard to include everybody" "Change your attitude according to your goal".	Interesting - "se seg selv utefra" ↳ Kegan → Subject Object ▽ Take different perspective ▽ Hard for some ▽ Get a chance to reflect on "what is a good leader" / + how they are themselves. ▽ Thought : (Self) - awareness can be (maybe) passive...? - Forget to <u>act</u> and just reflect.

Appendix 3

Info:
We will be talking for about one hour. If you want to stop during the interview or don't want to answer my questions just let me know.

What I would like to do in this interview is getting close to some of your thoughts and experiences about awareness and reflection. It is important that you respond from your own experiences rather than theory. I am not looking for "the right answer". I'm interested in a realistic picture and your personal experience.

(First I would like to take a short time where we both try to focus our energy on this conversation, so I would like to invite you to close your eyes and sit in a comfortable position. Now, take a few deep breaths and relax. Then you can open your eyes again, and we can begin our conversation. Is there anything you would like to say before we start?)

How has it been for you to participate in this course?

- What kind of insights have you gained about yourself? The most important thing you have learned?

- Are there any specific elements from the course that has brought awareness to habitual patterns or assumptions?
Follow up:
> - Has the use of the 360 feedback-tool given you any new insights and discoveries about yourself?
> - Has the use of the 4 column-exercise brought awareness to habitual patterns or assumptions you have? (not sure about this..)

- Which feelings did the feedback create in you?

- Are there any specific elements from the feedback that you were surprised by?

What does reflection mean to you?
- Have you developed new practices for reflection in relation to this course? (I'll refer to what they told me in the initial interview)
Follow up:
> – What is it you reflect upon? (How deep does it go?) Has your level of reflection changed?

- How is it for you to reflect on your own emotions, attitudes and assumptions? (e.g. When using the 4 column-exercise) How does it make you feel? Has it helped you develop as a leader?

- What triggers reflection in you?
- Can you describe any situations in which reflection helps you? Can it also be limiting or get in the way for you?

What does self-awareness mean to you?
- How do you think self-awareness can help you develop as a leader?

- Have your understanding of self-awareness changed during this course? How?

- Do you have any experience with situations in which you had the feeling of consciously "seeing yourself from the outside" and became aware of your inner feelings, assumptions or attitudes, and that made a difference for you? In the situation? Later? Describe.

- What happened? How did you act? How did it make you feel?

- Did the homework you did in the course have any impact on your self-awareness? How?

- Can you describe to me/give an example of how you work with becoming aware of your own assumptions and habitual patterns?

- What do you think of the following assertion:

"It is not only what leaders do and how they do it, but their interior condition, that is the inner place from which they operate – the source and quality of their attention".

Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

NSD

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Vår dato: 07.04.2009   Vår ref :21363 / 2 / IBH Deres dato: Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 17.02.2009. All nødvendig
informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 03.04.2009. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

21363	*Self-awareness in Leadership*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Jonathan Reams*
Student	*Sine Bjerregård Hanssen*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i
henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.
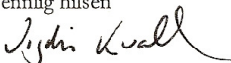
Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i
meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-
helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de
opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema,
http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom
prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database,
http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.10.2009, rette en henvendelse angående
status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

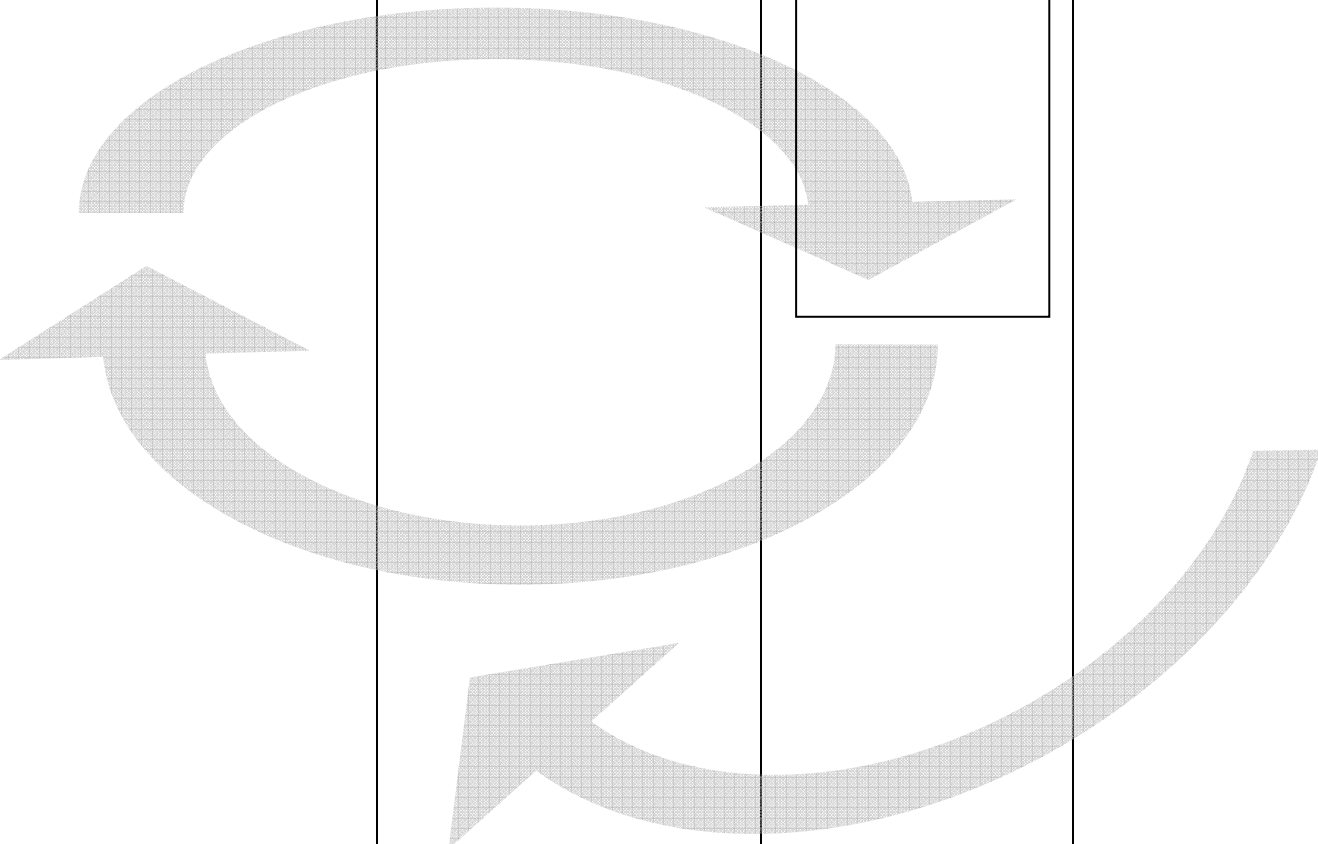Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim   Ingvild Bergan Hordvik

Kontaktperson: Ingvild Bergan Hordvik tlf: 55 58 32 32
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Sine Bjerregård Hanssen, Tverrveien 27, 7560 VIKHAMMER

Avdelingskontorer / *District Offices:*
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Appendix 5

The four column exercise by Kegan & Lahey (2009)

1 MY IMPROVEMENT GOAL	2 THINGS I DO (OR FAIL TO DO) THAT WORK AGAINST MY IMPROVEMENT GOAL	3 MY COMPETING COMMITMENTS	4 MY BIG ASSUMTION
		WORRY BOX	