



Karlstad Business School

Handelshögskolan vid Karlstads universitet

Malin Ahlén

“With a Little Help from My Friends”

- A Study of Project Managers' Perceptions of Self-Leadership

Project Management

Master's Thesis

Semester: Autumn 2021

Supervisors: H. Bergman, T. Gustavsson

Table of contents

i. Abstract	1
ii. Sammanfattning	2
iii. Preface	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1. Purpose	5
1.2. Research Questions	5
2. Theoretical framework and Definitions	6
2.1 Leadership in Projects	7
2.2 Criticism of the Concept of Self-leadership	8
3. Method	8
3.1 Data Collection	8
3.2 Inclusion Criteria	9
3.3 Implementation	9
3.4 Data Processing	10
3.5 Reliability and Validity of the Study	11
3.6 Ethical Considerations	12
4. Results	12
4.1. The first theme “Listen to Your Heart”, The Management of Emotions	14
4.2. Theme 2: “With A Little Help from my Friends”. The Power of Collective Intelligence.	15
4.3. Theme 3: “Freedom (I will not give you up)”. Alignment between Work & Life.	18
4.4. Theme 4: “Eye of the Tiger”. The Resilient Project Manager.	19
5. Discussion	21
5.1. Comments on themes.	21
5.2. Conclusions	27
5.3 The Study’s Limitations	28
5.4 Suggestions for Future Research	28
6. References	29
Appendix 1: Information letter to respondents	34
Appendix 2: Consent Form	34
Appendix 3: Interview Guide	36

i. Abstract

This qualitative study is about project managers' perceptions of self-leadership and its benefits and challenges for the project managers, the team, and the project result.

The study has been implemented by conducting semi-structured interviews with ten project managers from diverse cultural backgrounds, ages, and work sectors with experience of self-leadership. The data obtained has been transcribed, coded, and analysed by using thematic analysis.

The main themes that were found were the following: The management of emotions, the power of collective intelligence, alignment between work and life and the final theme of the resilient project manager. The first theme deals with the importance of being self-aware and authentic as a project manager and to focus on emotional intelligence rather than IQ and hard skills. The second theme's focal point is on the importance of having feedback and support from the team, mentors, or co-workers in learning more about oneself as a project manager. The third theme deals with project managers' having a balance between their work and their spare time by planning and being organized, with the purpose of not becoming overworked or lose out on valuable time with friends and family.

The final theme handles the project manager's focus on strengths and being persistent until the end of a project.

The benefits of self-leadership, according to the respondents in this study, are easier to experience for the project manager him/herself in terms of self-development but benefits can also be seen for the whole team and indirectly for the project goal as with a well-functioning project manager and self-governing team, the project results will improve.

One challenge of self-leadership can be to lead oneself with a long-term perspective as priorities and teams change in projects. Also, if a project manager does not have support, it can be difficult for him/her to keep the motivation to self-lead.

The results in this study are in alignment with earlier studies such as for instance Neck, Manz & Houghton's study from 2019.

Keywords: Project management, self-leadership, self-awareness, collective intelligence

ii. Sammanfattning

Denna kvalitativa studie handlar om projektledares uppfattning av självledarskap och dess fördelar och utmaningar för projektledarna själva, teamet och projektresultatet.

Studien har genomförts genom semi-strukturerade intervjuer med tio projektledare från olika kulturella bakgrunder, åldrar och arbetssektorer med erfarenhet av självledarskap.

De semi-strukturerade intervjuerna har spelats in och materialet har transkriberats och kodats enligt Brymans upplägg (Bryman, 2020).

Materialet har sedan analyserats med hjälp av Braun och Clarkes upplägg för tematisk analys (Braun, 2006). Intervjuerna har genomförts både på svenska och engelska och intervjuerna på svenska har översatts av forskaren själv till engelska och kodats därefter.

Under kodningen framkom fyra teman samt flera underteman.

Huvudtemana var följande: Hanteringen av känslor, självledarskap som samskapande, balans mellan jobb och fritid samt den motståndskraftiga projektledaren.

Det första temat handlar om vikten av att vara självmedveten och autentisk som projektledare och att emotionell intelligens är lika viktigt som IQ och hårda kunskaper.

Det andra temat handlar om vikten av att ha stöd och få feedback från sitt team, mentorer eller kollegor för att lära mer om sig själv som projektledare.

Det tredje temat handlar om projektledares behov av att ha en balans mellan jobb och fritid genom planering och genom att vara organiserad, med syftet att inte bli utbränd eller förlora viktiga tid tillsammans med vänner och familj.

Det sista temat berör att projektledaren bör fokusera på sina styrkor och vikten av att inte ge upp även vid motstånd.

Fördelarna med självledarskap, enligt respondenterna i studien, är lättare att se för projektledaren själv när det gäller t.ex. självutveckling men fördelar kan även ses för hela teamet samt även för projektmålet eftersom en välfungerande projektledare och ett självgående, reflekterande team, förbättrar projektresultaten.

En utmaning med självledarskap kan vara att orka leda sig själv med ett långsiktigt perspektiv då prioriteringar och team kan förändras i projekt. En annan aspekt är om projektledaren inte har stöd kan det vara svårt att upprätthålla motivationen att självleda. Detta lyfter fram vikten av att ha stöttande chefer, mentorer eller kollegor då bättre resultat nås genom samskapande.

Resultaten i denna studie överensstämmer med tidigare studier i ämnet som t.ex. Neck, Manz

och Houghtons studie (Neck, 2019) som handlar om strategier för självledarskap, dock ej för projektledare.

Nyckelord: projektledning, självledarskap, självinsikt, kollektiv intelligens

iii. Preface

Why did I choose the topic of self-leadership? My interest awoke during our leadership course in the autumn of 2020 at Karlstad Business School and my interest increasingly grew through things we learnt in later courses in our master's programme and in the Ikigai coaching group.

Therefore, in the autumn of 2021, I started planning my thesis with great enthusiasm and anticipation. Unfortunately, twenty-five years ago I tried to write a master's thesis in English literature that was never completed. In short, my self-confidence failed me.

I thought to myself, I cannot do this, I am not capable of writing a master's thesis. And consequently, I emailed my teachers at Karlstad Business School to say that I was leaving the programme. To my surprise they answered, sure, no problem it sounds like a good decision, it sounds like you thought this through. Strangely enough, this had the reverse effect on me, and I decided there and then to do the opposite and not to give up because what did I have to lose? The worst thing that could happen is that I would have yet another unfinished master's thesis tucked away in a desk somewhere in the house.

So, these past six months, it has taken all my motivation, courage, and self-leadership skills to write this thesis and keep believing that I could do it. It has been a challenging and rewarding process and I could not have done it without a little help from my friends in team Lynx and my family. Thank you also to my enthusiastic respondents!

1.Introduction

Self-leadership has become a widespread concept in the last few years through research articles, courses, and books, especially within the fields of business, leadership, or psychology. There are several research articles on self-leadership, with the research varying from topics such as the effect self-leadership may have on virtual teams and the importance of trust to develop self-leadership through leadership that is shared according to Castellano et al (Castellano, 2021) or on how graduate students can develop their leadership skills through self-reflection, leadership assessment and self-awareness (Lawrence, 2018).

Van Dorssen et al (2020) have written two articles on how self-leadership skills can be especially beneficial for personnel working in hospitals in terms of better health, performance, and engagement (Van Dorssen, 2020).

A recent example of research on self-leadership is Dondi et al's article (Dondi, 2021) with the focus on skills needed in the future in the workplace. There, self-leadership is considered one of the most important skills to have and the authors mean that it will play an even more significant role in the future. Dondi et al even say that self-leadership skills may be lacking in the future and that it may be difficult to verify and value such competencies (Dondi, 2021).

Also, Browning (Browning, 2018) raises awareness in her article that self-leadership needs to be given more space in research and in the workplace and describes in her article what the process might look like for a leader who wants to strive to be a more successful self-leader. But how is self-leadership defined? One definition of many is Browning's: "Self-leadership includes self-awareness, setting goals for self, honouring self, actively rejecting pessimism, and being the change, you want to see in the world." (Browning, 2018, p. 14.)

Another researcher who also links self-leadership to self-awareness is Cashman (Cashman, 2017) who means that successful leaders need to be authentic to heighten their self-awareness. Cashman defines authenticity as the continuous process of building self-awareness of our whole person, as well as being transparent with others about our whole person - both strengths and limitations: "this heightened self-awareness allows us to predict our likely responses to a variety of situations." (Cashman, 2017, p. 39).

Another aspect of the benefits of increased self-leadership is mentioned in by for example Unsworth and Mason (Unsworth, 2012) who found that improved knowledge of self-leadership leads to better opportunities for the individual to manage stress (Unsworth, 2012).

However, despite the extensive number of books and research articles as mentioned above, there is a limited number of research on self-leadership among project managers and in projects. For instance, when doing a search on self-leadership in a Swedish context in the last five years, what came up were different theses handling self-leadership such as Johnsson's thesis from Linné University on self-leadership and innovation (Johnsson, 2021) as well as Andrén and Jönsson's thesis from Halmstad University on IT-consultants and self-leadership strategies (Andrén, 2020). There was nothing to be found on project managers and self-leadership. Because of this research gap, the focus in this study will be on project managers' perception of self-leadership. This study will investigate if self-leadership can be specifically beneficial for project managers who work in different projects with temporary teams and various stakeholders and budgets restraints.

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate project managers' perceptions of self-leadership as this has not previously been researched on as mentioned in the introduction. Extensive research has been done on self-leadership but not with the focus on project managers or on self-leadership in project environments.

The aim is thus to look at project managers perceive self-leadership, and what its possible benefits and challenges may be for the project manager him/herself, the project team and project goals.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the purpose above, the following questions has been formulated:

- How do project managers lead themselves?
- What may be the benefits and challenges of self-leadership be for the project managers themselves, the project goal, and the team?

2. Theoretical framework and Definitions

Leadership can be defined as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” according to Northouse (Northouse, 2021, p.3.)

Leadership also applies to organisations as well as individuals whereas self-leadership relates to the human aspect of leadership where a self-leader uses self-management methods individually or in a team to develop, according to Parakhina, Boris, and Strielkowski (Parakhina, 2019, p. 34).

Self-leadership was first mentioned by Charles C. Manz in 1986, who defined it as a “comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done naturally motivating” (Manz, 1986, p. 585). Naturally motivating tasks can also be called *intrinsic* motivation and tasks that are not naturally motivating can be linked to *extrinsic* motivation (Manz, 1986).

Neck, Manz and Houghton (Neck, 2019) have since 1986 further developed the concept and divided it into three categories of self-leadership where the first one is a strategy of behaviour management with the focus on self-awareness, for the purpose of the individual to complete tasks that are less rewarding. The second one is focused on increasing *intrinsic motivation* by using reward strategies that can increase an individual's sense of purpose and competence. And the third one, strategies for thought patterns which can also be called cognitive readiness or mental preparedness (Neck, 2019).

Leadership and self-leadership may be seen as connected because of the individual's wish of being the best he/she can be at her job, but self-leadership skills can also help a person develop their leadership skills in general according to Parakhina et al (Parakhina, 2019).

However, Parakhina et al also point out that there are differences between the two concepts in how structure of motives and priorities are organized as the leadership process includes the capacity to encourage individuals to achieve their goals which leads back to the goal of the organization whereas self-leadership more clearly relates to self-improvement of each person reflecting on their values, motives, and ambitions (Parakhina, 2019).

Self-management is a concept that has been seen as intricately linked to self-leadership and can be defined as externally motivated organizational behaviour, as opposed to internally, as in the case with self-leadership. Organizational behaviour means in this sense that you apply

or study knowledge of how teams or people work within an organization where you work (Mayfield, 2021).

The definition of *self-awareness* is on the other hand: “Internal self-awareness is what we typically refer to as introspection, the process of understanding our preferences, motivations and behaviours. External self-awareness is understanding how we are perceived and the impact we have on others. Both are needed to maximize the benefits of self-awareness.” (Zuckerman et al, 2018, p. 17). Self-awareness is a necessary part of self-leadership as will be discussed later in this study.

As this study deals with perceptions of self-leadership, *perception* can be explained as something which is a view that several people agree on and reflects how things appear according to the Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

2.1 Leadership in Projects

As this study deals with project managers' perceptions of self-leadership, a definition of leadership in projects is also necessary. Project leadership differs from other types of leadership in that the prerequisites are different and that the role can entail being both a manager and a leader with many diverse tasks as budget control, getting the team together as well as strategic work according to Lee (Lee, 2009). In a project, the team can consist of staff who have chosen to be part of the project voluntarily, or have been told to be part of the project, which can affect the motivation or lack of motivation of the participants, which ultimately can also affect the project result according to Bolton (Bolton, 2020).

Also, a team may be a new, so-called immature group, consisting of people from different departments and /or expert areas who have never worked together before which puts pressure on the project manager to get the group together fast as the span of the project can be short as mentioned by among others Wenell (Wenell, 2014).

Other challenges for a project manager may be that results are measured on a short- term basis and that project goals, the tools, and the plan to get there are uncertain. All this puts higher pressure on project managers to be more flexible and to adapt their leadership style according to the prerequisites of the project. (Jansson, 2017).

The leadership style of the project manager is very important according to Geoghegan and Dulewicz (Geoghegan, 2008) where competencies such as delegation, resource division and project development are especially valuable.

2.2 Criticism of the Concept of Self-leadership

Self-leadership has been criticized by for instance Stewart, Courtright and Manz (Stewart, 2019) who mean that there are four paradoxes when it comes to self-leadership. The first paradox is about the fact that being conscious and working with self-leadership can cause exhaustion in the person practising it and can therefore be difficult to obtain with a longer perspective. The second one relates to the notion that as self-leadership is a concept both on team - and individual level, if used too much, can create too much independence and be self-destructive (Stewart, 2019). The third paradox is that the benefits of self-leadership for individuals such as autonomy and self-direction is not always encouraged by managers who therefore may constrain their employees in exercising self-leadership fully. The fourth and last paradox deals with the need to use self-leadership to improve it. In this assumption lies that if there are no self-leadership skills in a team or in an individual, it may become difficult to improve those skills as concluded by Stewart et al (Stewart, 2019).

3. Method

The aim of this study is to focus on project managers' perceptions of self-leadership and how project managers lead themselves and what the benefits and challenges may be when it comes to the project managers themselves, the team and the project goals.

This study has been conducted using qualitative semi-structured interviews according to the set-up by Bryman (2020). The advantage of doing qualitative research on this topic is that the concept of self-leadership can be examined from a human perspective, and it may be possible to withdraw psychological impact factors from the data such as how the respondents perceive and handle their own self-leadership.

3.1 Data Collection

Interviews were used as a data collection method to better understand the topic of the study. Also, this method is especially suitable to investigate new areas and to form conclusions and new theories. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way for the purpose of not making the respondents feel limited or controlled in their interviews. The point of using this type of semi-structured interview is to create flexibility and to put the focus on how the

respondent perceives, interprets, and prioritizes questions and events (Bryman, 2020). With the objective of receiving honest answers from the respondents, an interview guide was used but with a flexible, open approach in order not to control the respondents too much and to obtain spontaneous and detailed answers, sometimes follow-up questions were asked such as “please tell me more” or “how did that feel?” to receive more in-depth answers (Bryman, 2020). The order of the questions varied depending on the answers received from the respondents. The aim was to keep a flow in the dialogue without interruptions. Some questions received longer answers than others. Follow-up questions were included if the respondent expanded on a particular subject related to a question later in the interview guide.

3.2 Inclusion Criteria

As the study investigates project managers' perceptions of self-leadership, the inclusion criteria were participants who were currently working as project managers or had been working as project managers for at least two years and who had experience of self-leadership. The inclusion criteria were therefore not limited to a certain work sector, but the participants were selected from a broad group of project managers of different ages and experiences and from all demographics and work sectors. The respondents were contacted via the researcher's networks, through Facebook and LinkedIn. The age range was between 25 to 72 years with an average age of 48, and project management experience ranging from two years to more than forty years of experience. Six of the respondents originated from Sweden and four respondents were from other countries in Europe.

3.3 Implementation

The ten respondents who replied that they were interested in taking part in the study received an email with more detailed information and a consent form for them to sign. The respondents signed the consent form and sent it back by email. All respondents expressed a genuine interest in the topic and participated in the interviews with great enthusiasm. They were all interviewed via Zoom or Teams and the interviews were recorded with a voice tool in Google Drive which noted down what the respondents said with the aim of facilitating transcription. Each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions in the interview guide were used in different order depending on how the respondents answered the questions.

The flexible order of the questions helped the respondents to feel more unlimited in their responses as it gave them more time to talk more deeply about a topic, they found interesting without being interrupted by the researcher.

Interviews were saved on a local file on the computer as well as on an external hard drive. After the study has been approved, the files will be erased. The interviews were then transcribed and read several times and analysed according to Braun and Clarke's method (Braun, 2006). Certain comments by the respondents were marked with red by the researcher to highlight interesting comments relevant for the study.

3.4 Data Processing

To find themes and patterns in the data obtained, the data was coded and thematically analysed. The steps were the following according to Braun and Clarke (Braun, 2006):

1. The interviews were transcribed and read several times.
2. The data was coded in Word by the researcher by reading the interviews as one big text and looking for code words. Code words were then transferred to a separate file in Word.
3. When the text had been coded, the codes were made into subthemes and main themes.
4. The subthemes and themes in the text were checked to put linked themes together into one main theme.
5. Four main themes were found and were named.
6. The themes and conclusions are presented in this study.

The interviews were all done in English or Swedish out of which four interviews were in English and six in Swedish. The initial plan was to do all interviews in English as the study is written in English but then many interesting respondents were found in Sweden, and it was easier to interview the respondents in their native language. The interviews conducted in Swedish were after transcription, translated into English by the researcher with the purpose of having all the data coded as one text in English. The fact that six interviews were translated from Swedish to English may have affected the quality of the study but since the researcher has educational background and experience as a translator, this may have been avoided to a greater extent. Also, the thesis has been scrutinized by native speakers of English at the library at Karlstad University.

There were several read-throughs of the text looking for codes. In the text, all useful quotes and code words were marked red to highlight comments relevant to the study. The codes were then divided into themes. Four main themes were selected based on the information that came up in the interviews.

The advantage with thematic analysis for this study is that the different themes could be sorted and coded depending on the results that were obtained when interpreting the codes as it was then possible to analyse and make conclusions.

When using an inductive approach, an unconditional and careful approach as well as several read-throughs were necessary which worked well with this type of study. One challenge in this study was that there were many themes but only a few could be selected based on size and time limitations of the study. Another challenge was that the interviews were held in two different languages, which may affect the results as some information may be lost in translation. However, as mentioned earlier, this challenge was minimized as the researcher has a background in translation from Swedish to English and as the quotes in English were double checked by English-speaking staff at Karlstad University library.

3.5 Reliability and Validity of the Study

With the intention of obtaining a high quality and strengthening the reliability and validity of the study, it was discussed in various groups where feedback was received from peers as well as in supervision classes with the teachers. Congruity in the interviews was created by recording all the interviews and by using a methodical and transparent process in data collection and implementation. The respondents' quotes were included in the result section to substantiate the data (Bryman, 2020).

In this type of qualitative study, it can be difficult to avoid the researcher's bias, foremost based on preconceived ideas and values which may cause difficulty in obtaining objectivity. Another challenge for the researcher is not to be influenced by the topics and themes that the respondents prefer to discuss. Braun and Clarke (Braun, 2006) also mean that another challenge can be that themes can be located too quickly without being properly analysed which can be avoided by several read-throughs of the material. To avoid such challenges, some measures were taken in this study such as using a representative group of respondents, all project managers with diverse backgrounds, ages, genders, and work experience. Another

example is the use of the same interview guide for all respondents, which also included follow-up questions to avoid misunderstandings. The interview guide was rehearsed by the researcher prior to the implementation of the interviews and the questions were also discussed in the thesis work group Lynx to make sure that the quality of the questions was high and that the questions were relevant for the study.

For the validity criterion to be fulfilled, the researcher made sure that the data matched the research questions and the aim of the study according to Denscombe (Denscombe, 2016). Also, research results and conclusions were logically matched through a systematic presentation of the results according to Bryman (Bryman, 2020).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The requirements for information, consent, confidentiality, and utilization in this study are taken from The Swedish Research Council's Ethical Considerations for Research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). One requirement is the individual protection requirement which entails that no person taking part in the study is physically or mentally hurt. It is therefore important that the results of the study remain anonymous so that none of the respondents, risk feeling exposed or having to experience unwanted consequences by participating in the study. This requirement was fulfilled as the respondents in this study were emailed a consent letter as well as informed of the purpose of the study. The consent letter included information that the respondents could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted and that their answers were anonymous. The information was also repeated in the interview as an introduction. In the end of the interviews the respondents were informed that they would be sent the study when it was finalized and that the recordings of the interviews would be destroyed when the thesis was approved.

4. Results

This study is about project managers' perceptions of self-leadership and its benefits and challenges for the project managers, the team, and the project result. When coding and analysing the interviews, the following four themes emerged: the first theme dealing with the management of emotions, the second one on the power of collective intelligence, the third one on alignment between work and life and the fourth theme on the resilient project manager.

The emerging themes and sub themes have been listed in the overview below and linked to examples of relevant quotes.

Table 1: Themes 1-4 incl. sub themes.

Quotes (examples):	Theme:	Sub themes (a selection)
If you start with what self-leadership really is, I think it is about self-reflection and about continuously getting to know yourself to understand what you need and do not need.	1. "Listen to Your Heart". The Management of Emotions	The self-aware project manager To have or not have self-esteem Soft and hard skills Heart and brain
I cannot say that I am a self-leader. This should be a perception of others. It is the team, or the organization, or the senior management, who decide if you are a true leader.	2. "With a Little Help from My Friends". The Power of Collective Intelligence.	Positive and negative feedback Blind spots Self-managing teams
The advantage for me is that I become free in a certain way, and that I do not need a boss.	3. "Freedom (I Will Not Give You Up)". Alignment between Work and Life	A balancing act Planning, planning, planning Setting boundaries
I think one of the biggest shocks for me when I took the character-strengths [test], bravery came out as one of my top strengths, and I thought the survey was broken because I'm somebody that's struggled with anxiety all my life.	4. "Eye of the Tiger". The Resilient Project Manager	Age and experience matter A long-term perspective Focus on strengths Resilience Trust The project manager's role

4.1. The first theme “Listen to Your Heart”, The Management of Emotions

This theme concludes the respondents' comments on the importance of self-awareness and self-reflection to become a true and genuine project manager and leader. A benefit from self-leadership is thus getting to know yourself well to lead yourself and others better and to achieve a better result. Self-awareness was stated as fundamental by the respondents, not only in the sense of knowing your good qualities but also to be aware of your negative sides. Many of the respondents pointed out how they, at the start of their careers, only had their focus on their own career development and therefore worked hard, sometimes more than sixty hours a week, to reach that status goal such as a higher position. After years of working, they realized that it was not enough to only focus on their next career step, on profit or reaching project goals but that it was time to turn inwards, to listen to their hearts and to take care of their own well-being:

As I get older and more experienced, I have let in my feelings, my gut feeling, my own judgment. I listen more, that sort of stuff, and for a while it was too much of it, but now I have found something of a balance there. Now it is not too much of one or the other, but a balance, and I think that if you include your feelings, your judgment and intuition and stuff like that, your working life will also be more fun.

The positive effects of their self-leadership were thus that project managers, when getting to know themselves better and their needs, they reached their personal as well as professional goals easier. Also, several of the respondents pointed out that without having self-awareness about your own mistakes or weaknesses, it is not possible to be a successful project manager who leads the way for others, for instance the team and to achieve project goals or getting things done:

It is important to get to know yourself and to develop self-distance and self-knowledge in a way so that you know yourself better and so you can see when you are making excuses and fooling around. I can recognise it earlier now and I have received help in doing that by using a type of supervisor talks but with colleagues and supervisor talks where we help each other but also through therapy.

Listening more inwards and focusing on emotions, became a tool for the respondents to make

better decisions and to trust their instincts. Also, the focus on soft skills such as interpersonal skills as for instance abilities to communicate, to be creative and work well in a team, rather than hard skills such as language-or technical skills was mentioned by the respondents. The results from the interviews thus show that project managers in this study were moving away from only focusing on IQ and turning more towards emotional intelligence and people skills as more important assets when leading a project and leading yourself as a project manager:

Self-leadership is very much about balancing brain and heart, and we did not learn about that in our social systems today, but it is all about brain, brain, brain. We have lost a lot of what it is to be a human being, that is to be in our hearts too. If you want to reach the level of being a great project manager, one basic precondition is that you can engage people to want to do what you want to do and lead them, and then it is not only about hard skills and project goals but about making the team feel good and having them enjoy going to work.

Another important tool that was mentioned as essential for becoming more self-reflective was having support. Meditation, note-taking, and therapy were emphasized by respondents as helpful in gaining insight into their own behaviour. The respondents all stated that it could be a challenge to lead yourself and be self-aware as there sometimes is a lack of focus or self-belief. Self-esteem was said to be something that does not come by itself. One respondent mentioned struggling with low self-esteem their whole life as when things went bad, they lost their self-esteem completely and when things were fine, it came back. Reading fiction, having a mentor or a coach and meditating were seen as tools to help build a better self-esteem, but it was also considered a volatile skill as it, according to respondents, demands a continuous process and development.

When it came to the respondents' challenges with self-leadership in terms of looking inwards, the ability to stay focused in the long-term perspective was mentioned. As self-leadership is an internal process based on motivation, all the respondents stated that they sometimes struggled with being persistent in that process.

4.2. Theme 2: "With A Little Help from my Friends". The Power of Collective Intelligence.

Theme two deals with how project managers can use feedback and support to become inspirational leaders. This theme also reflects the respondents' thoughts on self-leadership as a

collective rather than individual concept and process where one cannot be a leader to others without taking in their perspectives. Communication was seen as key. The respondents all emphasized how they continuously asked for feedback and help from your colleagues, friends, and family to understand how they were perceived by others so that they could be better project managers, friends, and partners:

In my daily work, my strategy is to do things collaboratively. I always try to include my friends into the decision- making process; how we could manage this project, for example. And then I collect, or I ask, or I request from them their feedback on how we can initiate or develop such initiatives. This is important, to listen and take feedback from your team. Because sometimes as Mr. Månsson points out, we have some blind spots. Every person, yes, we as project managers have a general understanding of things and how things should be done. You should have an overview of the project, but sometimes you need different angles, you need different ideas, maybe clashing ideas, so that you can improve your management skills and coordinate the project in a better way.

One respondent pointed out that with the purpose of being a good leader, it is necessary to be open to mirroring from people around you and notice how they react to you and treat you to look for clues on what you are doing right or wrong. If the feedback you receive is positive, you can rely on the fact that you are doing something right but when the mirroring is negative, you must think about what you said or how you said it to get that reaction from your co-workers or other people around you:

I use a lot of reflection and the easiest way to do that is by looking at when I send out something, [...], when I say something, I communicate, what the reaction is that I get back from my surroundings, from other people. It does not depend on these people, but it depends a lot on what I convey, both through body language, my level of voice, and of course, partly the content. And from that I get back information on what bounces back to me, and that is the most important thing that I have.

Even though the importance of having for instance co-workers who could mirror their behaviour, or give advice in demanding situations at work, some of the respondents also mentioned how hard they found it to ask for feedback and to specifically receive negative feedback. Other respondents were confident and did not mind feedback, both negative and positive, if it was structurally given as part of the work culture. One example of that being the “Hot Chair” that has been used in a large company for employees to give feedback to their

managers. In practice this meant that their managers were sitting in a chair answering questions and receiving constructive feedback from their employees. This process was perceived as positive and developing for the project managers and was judged as something worthwhile and valuable to their team members as well. One issue that was mentioned by the respondents was that as a project manager you do not always receive feedback from co-workers for their fear of repercussions such as not being offered a better position or missing out on an interesting project in the future. Often, a project manager could be lucky if they had a few team members willing to be honest with their superiors in order to learn more about their own behaviour, according to one respondent.

Trust is also an important issue that came up in the interviews. To be a leader that people look up to, to be seen as credible and reliable project manager, they must be trustworthy and keep promises. One respondent expressed it like this:

And how do you create trust? You know that yourself. It does not matter if it is about projects or your whole life. If the one you are supposed to trust tricks you and lies to you, because she or he could not keep what they had promised, well, I base my leadership on one thing: Children. [...] And adults are the same, you still get upset if someone does not keep what they have promised you and one thing can be sure, and I have missed it many times, the person you have promised something, will not forget it.

All respondents expressed the importance or wish to have support in the form of a coach, a mentor, a manager and/or network to discuss their work with and to get constructive feedback. All the respondents also mentioned that they had someone at their workplace or outside of work to turn to. For instance, a manager, a colleague, a therapist, or mentor but they also expressed that they would appreciate more support, if possible, for instance in the form of a network or a person in a role like a Head of Projects. The benefits of leading themselves and having the support of someone else were stated as basic for doing a good job and for feeling motivated.

If we understand that we need to focus on understanding and helping each other to create possibilities and to talk about facts and not persons, it becomes much easier to solve things. It is like when you start working on a project or whatever it is, we set the rules together.

Some respondents mentioned self-managing teams as a result and benefit of self-leadership

meaning teams where members are so secure in their individual roles and in leading themselves that they are independent and can create their own projects and goals with very little support from the project manager him/herself.

Challenges with self-leadership in a collective context, according to the respondents, was the dependence on others' feedback and views, and of having to rely on the fact that those expressed views were honest and constructive instead of based on expectations.

4.3. Theme 3: “Freedom (I will not give you up)”. Alignment between Work and Life.

This theme deals with the importance of planning and setting boundaries to achieve balance and freedom. In the interviews, all respondents mentioned the importance of planning their workday carefully but also to include their free time in their planning to include having time for relaxation, family, friends, or exercise. Several of the respondents emphasized a need to be in alignment, in balance, when it came to their work and their spare time with the goal of feeling healthy and happy but also to achieve their goals at work and be appreciated in the workplace and by their superiors:

The gain for me is knowing, it sounds drastic, but that I will survive, I mean, it is easy to drown. You must learn how to relax sometimes and then there can be periods where you work all the time but then I can lead myself that way. [...] It is about learning and about planning and relaxing and change to do other things, like recovery or to learn something new or something that is interesting and then come back to doing all that intensive stuff. So, you grow and change your environment and that is my tool, to try to have a plan so you can take charge more easily.

The benefits of self-leadership, in the sense of planning one's day and week which result in control over one's time, were mentioned by all respondents. Planning was also emphasized to be a big part of the concept of self-leadership and to obtain control in one's life. Having a balance between work and free time benefited also all members of the team, according to the respondents, and created an atmosphere of “we're in it together” which would also lead to a better work environment and ultimately better project results.

One part of planning that was mentioned in the interviews, was to have structure in their paperwork as without it, the respondents said, they would lose time trying to find their files

and notes. Also, if files were not in order, it would create unnecessary stress and irritation. Some of the respondents mentioned using digital tools in the computer for aid, but also Pomodoro, a time management method developed in the 1980s in Italy to keep the time and have regular breaks every twenty minutes. All respondents indicated that without planning, their freedom to do other things would diminish and that it also helped them to stop working at the end of the day, to leave the workplace to do other things.

The importance of making lists. Certain things need to be scheduled for things to happen and for dreams to become reality because not until you put it on the computer well then, it becomes practical. But then it is also important to talk about inner motivation and things like that.

Being organized was also seen as a tool to set boundaries towards superiors, stakeholders, and other colleagues, as when you are perceived as clear about what you want and how far you are prepared to go in doing a certain task, your boundaries will be respected by others. One respondent mentioned a co-worker who became burnt-out from pleasing everyone around them and for not saying “no” to working late or doing certain tasks that did not fall into their responsibilities so burn out was mentioned as the pitfall of not setting boundaries. A challenge with self-leadership in the context of planning that was mentioned by the respondents, was that it demands self-control and organizational skills that do not come naturally if you are not trained in them or have been given the right tools.

4.4. Theme 4: “Eye of the Tiger”. The Resilient Project Manager.

This theme deals with the project manager's focus on strengths and staying resilient through to project goal. In the interviews all respondents concluded that it is not enough to have self-insight, find a work-life balance and get support from your peers but as a project manager leading yourself, you also must be persistent and work with your self-leadership skills with a determined approach and a long-term perspective:

...to take yourself seriously in some way, to keep the planning you have made and even when it feels a little heavy, that you stick to your own deal or if you do not do it, that you do not get stuck in front of Netflix or too long in some task when you need to move on to something else, that you constantly need to motivate yourself in some way, and sometimes that can be hard.

Resilience or grit was something, according to the respondents, that could be continuously improved and developed through the setting of long-term and short-term goals and by completing them. Resilience was also mentioned by respondents as something especially useful for project managers as the structure of projects is more insecure than for instance working in a line organisation. Self-leadership was perceived as a goal and a process that required determination and taking care of lessons learnt and not something self-evident that every person in every company or organization can make use of.

For me self-leadership is that push to be better today than I was yesterday. The drive to learn a bit more [...] I will try a new way of doing a presentation and it sucks, it just does not work, and I could just go 'I'm crap at presentations,' no, I did not do an excellent job at that presentation, and I need to come back and revisit how I put it together. So, it is that willingness to learn.

The focus on resilience can also be linked to focusing on strengths as the respondents, believed motivation and resilience were linked to a favourable work environment and positive feedback in the team. The benefits of focusing on positive strengths rather than weaknesses was seen as an important part of leading themselves as project managers. The necessity to know our soft spots but focus on our strengths to push forward in the workplace was mentioned by several respondents. This emphasis on the positive was stated as something important as it helped the respondents with their self-confidence or self-doubt as well as taught them more about themselves and their team. Also, in terms of other benefits for the whole team, lifting colleagues and letting them know when they did an excellent job rather than picking on things that did not go so well was mentioned as essential. Several respondents also emphasized that a work ethic based on a mentality where it is ok to fail and to focus on lessons learnt improved the work atmosphere positively.

...and to work on my issues, everyone has issues, absolutely, but if we can see our strengths and weaknesses and see if I work with my strengths and get help from others with what I am weak at, then I do not have to feel like a bad person but as we work in a team, we have different strengths and weaknesses, strengths that connect.

Other important issues that surfaced in the interviews were factors that affected resilience such as age and project management experience. As the respondents had a big variety in those areas, ranging from two years' experience to more than forty, and 25 years of age to 72, it was clear that with more experience in the project management field and with age, came a greater resilience to, for instance stress and pressure from stakeholders and superiors, and a capability of judging when something is good enough.

When discussing resilience and strengths in the interviews, the project manager's specific role was mentioned by the respondents as a challenge of self-leadership as the project manager's role was perceived as more difficult than that of a line manager. The respondents meant that the lack of mandate that sometimes can be an issue for project managers as they work in projects during a limited time with different people in different teams can cause trust issues. One respondent said:

I want to state that it is much harder to be a project manager than a manager. You do not have the formal power tools as a project manager and your only tool is that you have been allocated resources to handle the job. [...] And it can be that the people working at the line have chosen project members who cannot do the job. But you had no power as a project manager to choose them.

5. Discussion

This study is about project managers' perceptions of self-leadership and its benefits and challenges for project managers, the team, and the project result. Although self-leadership is a criticized concept by some as seen in the introduction, it is clear in this study that it is something that is necessary to practise if you want to be a successful project manager. The method that was used was qualitative research with semi-structured interviews with ten project managers. The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and thematically analysed. This method proved to be relevant for this type of study as the researcher obtained enough material to make certain conclusions from the themes that were unravelled.

5.1. Comments on themes.

To summarize the results, for project managers to move from being *good* leaders to *great* leaders, they must be self-aware. Self-awareness is a fundamental base for self-leadership and can be developed over time, with practice and age. This aligns with research done by

Goleman about self-awareness as crucial among leaders who want to be exceptional, as it makes leaders honest and realistic. Also, leaders who are self-aware understand their own dreams, values, and goals according to Goleman (Goleman, 2013).

As the aim of this study was to look at project managers' perceptions of self-leadership in, themes concluded in this study were compared with the strategies of Neck, Manz & Houghton (Neck, 2019) to see if the model could be applied to this study. As a reminder, the strategies were the following: The first one being the strategy of behaviour management with the focus on self-awareness, for the purpose of the individual to complete tasks that are less rewarding. The second one with a focus on increasing intrinsic motivation by using reward strategies that can increase an individual's sense of purpose and competence. And the third one, strategies for thought patterns or cognitive readiness and positive thinking to positively affect tasks on hand (Neck, 2019).

As can be seen from the table below, the three categories of self-leadership of Neck, Manz and Houghton (2019) can clearly be linked to the different themes in this study except theme two with a focus on feedback and support that is more difficult to link. Theme two is rather a theme that should be added as a new strategy to Neck et al's theory as without the support and feedback from peers, friends and family, self-leadership can be misguided and negative as concluded in this study. *Table 2 (Neck, Manz & Houghton, 2019).*

	Strategy 1: Management of Behaviour & Self- awareness	Strategy 2: Intrinsic motivation & Sense of Purpose	Strategy 3: Constructive thought pattern strategies & Positive Thinking
Theme 1: The Management of Emotions	X	X	X
Theme 2: The Power of Collective Intelligence	X	X	
Theme 3: Alignment between Work and Life	X	X	
Theme 4: The Resilient Project Manager		X	X

Theme 1: “Listen to Your Heart”, Management of Emotions.

When discussing self-leadership in this study, it was initially inexplicit that self-leadership is something useful and beneficial for leaders, but self-leadership can also be practiced in a negative, manipulative way if the manager does not have any self-awareness and/or is a narcissist or dictator. This emphasizes the importance of project managers being self-aware and self-reflective as an aim to lead themselves and the team in a constructive way as mentioned by for instance Browning (Browning, 2018).

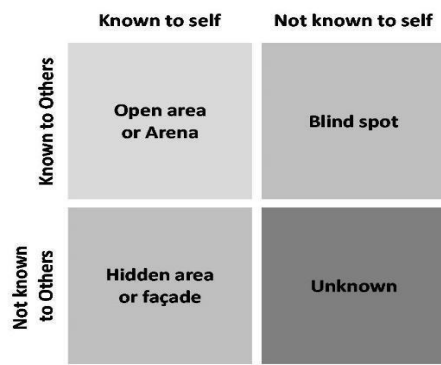
Interestingly, different levels of awareness could be seen in replies in theme one where more experienced project managers had a higher level of awareness about their personal limitations and strengths. Theme one also deals with soft skills versus hard skills where for instance Alvarenga et al mean that there is currently a focus on soft skills and that a mix of the two, soft and hard skills, is preferable when dealing with people in projects (Alvarenga, 2019). In this theme, also emotional intelligence is mentioned as an important skill to have for project managers with a focus on heart rather than brain. Maqbool et al (Maqbool, 2017) have concluded in their research that “project managers with high emotional intelligence who bear the desired competencies and exhibit transformational leadership behaviour are effective leaders and ensure higher success in projects than their counterparts.” (Maqbool et al, 2017, p. 58) which consolidates with conclusions made in this study.

The importance of self-esteem is also highlighted in this theme as a quality that is not constant, but a challenge that needs to be constantly revised. A higher self-esteem is also linked to greater chances of well-being and success in work, relationships, and health according to for instance Orth and Robins (Orth, 2014).

Theme 2: “With A Little Help from my Friends”, the power of collective intelligence

deals with the importance of having support as a project manager. In this theme, the necessity and/or the desire to have support from colleagues, a network, or a manager to be able to practice self-leadership was emphasized. According to Luft (Luft, 1963) who developed the communication model Johari's Window, the 'Blind Spot' that is, the part of us that is known to other people but unknown to ourselves, can be increased through feedback from people around you and can be a useful tool to reach self-awareness as well as improve communication and understanding in a team.

Table 3 (Luft, 1963)



The Johari Window Model

Communication is at the core of Johari’s window model as if we do not communicate, or ask about our strengths or limitations and do not express our thoughts to others about their behaviour, we will not find out about our blind spots (Luft, 1963).

Self-reflection is one aspect of leadership that can decrease the blind spot as when we self-reflect, we increase our knowledge about ourselves and our actions and how they can affect others according to Dishon et al (Dishon, 2017).

Also, this second theme encompasses the power of collective intelligence is understood as a process where problems are solved through the gathering and sharing of knowledge and skills by a group of people according to Hagemann and Schatz for instance (Hagemann, 2019).

Additionally, Hansen and Vaagen mean that collective intelligence is knowledge or wisdom that grows out of a group that cannot exist on individual level (Hansen, 2016).

Knowledge-sharing in a team leads to an increased learning process, better projects results and a great work-environment and benefit all aspects of the work, both on group and individual level as it increases innovation according to Carmeli et al (Carmeli, 2006).

Self-managing teams was also a subtheme in theme 2 and mentioned as a benefit of self-leadership. Muthusamy, Simmons, and Wheeler (Muthusamy, 2005) conclude in their article that teams that are self-managing can improve communication, autonomy and commitment which lead to more innovation and better results which is in alignment with Carmeli et al’s research mentioned above (Carmeli, 2006).

Feedback is highlighted as essential in this study in theme two for project managers to gain insight into their own capabilities and limitations. The importance of feedback is backed up by research done by for instance Wisniewski, Zierer and Hattie (Wisniewski, 2020) who conclude that feedback to be efficient needs to have the right content. Wisniewski et al’s

research also shows that feedback has a greater effect on for instance motor and cognitive skills than motivation or behaviour which may be surprising (Wisniewski, 2020).

Theme 3: “Freedom (I will not give you up)”. Alignment between Work and Life.

One part of theme three in this study was about having the capability of being open about one's limitations and boundaries as an important part of leading and knowing yourself. A project manager that is clear about his/her boundaries builds respect from others as he/she shows that they have integrity and that they are no pushovers as mentioned by Delisle (Delisle, 2020). A project manager who is open about his/her boundaries and shows vulnerability can also inspire others in the team to do the same. Delisle means that the contrary is a leader who never sets any boundaries and is available at all hours which can create confusion due to unclear expectations and may result in team members becoming worn-out as emphasized in Delisle's article on how project managers can manage work overload (Delisle, 2020).

Another benefit of setting boundaries is that clear boundaries and structure create trust as Edmonson focuses on in her article on psychological safety in the workplace (Edmonson, 2013). Edmonson means that trust is built in a team when members dare to speak out how they feel and what they want. The key is to give honest feedback to each other and to allow for mistakes to be made and from there take care of lessons learnt (Edmonson, 2013).

In theme three also the importance of planning is mentioned and Kumar and Adhish (Kumar, 2014) mean that although emotional competencies are at the core of self-management everything starts with time management as a leader needs to know how to set his/her priorities straight first (Kumar, 2014).

A work-life balance is also emphasized in theme 3 where no solutions are mentioned except creating time and space for exercise and family but a lot of research focuses on this important issue. For instance, Brady and Borts (Brady, 2016) argue that to evaluate your work-life balance as a project manager, you need to start by tracking your time and logging everything you do, as not until then can you see what you spend your time on. Brady and Borts also mean that a lack of a work-life balance can lead to more stress and health problems, less efficient behaviour at work as well as destroyed relationships (Brady, 2016).

Theme 4: “Eye of the Tiger”: The Resilient Project Manager.

A fourth theme that arose in the thematic analysis was the ability to stay focused and not give

up in combination with a positive approach. This positive approach aspect relates to the findings of the ViA Institute on Character, a non-profit organization in Ohio working on spreading the word about character strengths, on how important it is to focus on a person's character strengths rather than their weaknesses, to lift colleagues and co-workers by complementing them rather than picking on mistakes and weaknesses. Other important competencies according to the ViA Institute are also engagement, relationship focus as well as an ability to work well in a team (Gander, 2020).

Another organisation that has also come far, in developing a standard of competence for project managers, is the International Project Management Association (IPMA, 2022). IPMA has created a competence standard for project, programme, portfolio, and managers, the ICB4, which covers three areas of competence which are People, Practice and Perspective. It is essential to point out that in the People section, competencies such as leadership or soft skills namely self-reflection and self-management are stated as especially important for project managers, as well as skills in relation to the team, like personal communication, integrity, and reliability (IPMA, 2022).

The theme of resilience, or grit, is often discussed in research in for instance Karlsen and Berg's article (Karlsen, 2020) on the influence of project managers on project team resilience as important for leaders to have as it proves that the leader or manager is reliable and consistent. The importance of keeping promises is also something that was highlighted as an essential feature for project managers to gain team members' trust and increase motivation. In this study, one finding was that age was a variable that mattered, as with age, maturity and humbleness increased. An emotional intelligent project manager leads a team to greater success according to Maqbool et al who even mean that an emotional intelligent project manager is the key to project success (Maqbool, 2017).

Also, Moran emphasizes that acceptance and commitment training for leaders can create managers resilient to crisis and stress and improve innovation and work performance in the workplace (Moran, 2011) which may be relevant to future project managers.

A project manager is often seen as the manager but without having the mandate or the role to set salaries or deal with team members' personal problems that may affect performance. According to Sampietro, this undefined role of project managers does not only place the project manager in a challenging position as mentioned above but additionally puts demands on higher levels of autonomy and initiative, also in the long-term (Sampietro, 2015).

5.2. Conclusions

This study deals with project managers' perceptions of self-leadership and its benefits and challenges for the project managers, the team, and the project result. By looking at the themes, a clear picture of how self-leadership is perceived by project managers was given. The conclusion is that acting as a project manager in any organization or company can be a lonely task as the project manager is a leader but often without a supporting network or close colleagues which require as high demand on the project manager to be autonomous and self-efficient. In the four themes, there was an emphasis on the importance and benefits of being able to lead oneself. Self-leadership was perceived by project managers to be an ambiguous expression that can be interpreted differently but that it is an internal process that called for continuous personal development. Self-leadership was seen by the project managers as something that you must work with your whole life, both at home and at work. Being able to lead yourself also has big benefits in terms of self-development and self-awareness for the project manager him/herself but also for the team and to some extent for project results. The benefits of self-leadership for the project manager him/herself are for instance, as seen in the themes in this study: Increased self-awareness, the ability to balance personal and work life through planning. Self-leadership also gives the ability to prioritize tasks and to set boundaries. One fourth important benefit was the ability to ask for help and support from colleagues and friends to get insight into one's own behaviour and feedback on how to best lead a project. Communication is seen as essential in the give-and-take of feedback. Challenges of self-leadership were that if you are not self-aware you may be leading yourself to making the wrong decisions. Also, being persistent in leading oneself can be lonely and frustrating and especially hard to obtain with a long-term perspective as more urgent tasks such as reaching project goals, keeping the project budget, or getting the team together are more important.

For the team, the benefits are the same as for the project manager, if a project manager can lead him/herself, it is also beneficial for the team as they will be influenced by an authentic and empathic leader and be able to lead themselves better. It works two ways as the team will be able to lead itself better if they are more autonomous and self-reflective.

The benefits of self-leadership for the project goal were more difficult to measure according to the participants of this study but if a project manager and the team is performing well, it will affect the project results positively too according to the respondents. This however needs

to be investigated further.

The conclusions in this study are in alignment with earlier research on the concept and benefits of self-leadership but that maybe the second theme of the importance of collective intelligence could be investigated further.

5.3 The Study's Limitations

The study has been limited in that the number of respondents that were interviewed (10) were restricted due to time constraints. Should there have been more time, there would have been a bigger and more reliable base for making conclusions from the themes found. As the focus has been solely on the perceptions of project managers, a bigger study could have been done on other team members or project managers within a certain field of work or industry. Another factor may be that as some of the interviews were implemented in Swedish, there is a risk that from the respondents' expressions, ideas or quotes were misinterpreted by the researcher and lost in translation.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

The study of project managers' perceptions of self-leadership is a topic that could be further investigated with a larger group, or as a longitudinal study or within one sector specifically. It would also be interesting to look at a specific geographical area such as Sweden. Another approach could also be to look at connections between self-leadership and transformational leadership or self-leadership and authentic leadership among project managers as this has link has been mentioned in previous research but not in relation to project managers. Also, it would be interesting to more thoroughly investigate project managers' self-leadership skills and the effect that these can have on the team and project results, either as a qualitative study or a quantitative study using statistics.

6. References

- Alvarenga, J. B. (2019). The project manager core competencies to project success. .
International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, 13(2), 277-292.
[doi:doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-12-2018-0274](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-12-2018-0274)
- Andrén, H. &. (2020). *Self-leadership strategies among IT-consultants: A qualitative study about self-leadership and well-being*. Halmstad: Halmstad University.
- Bolton, B. (2020). Effective project leadership and culture under stay-home orders. *Journal of Airport Management*, 15(1), 28-39.
- Brady, R. &. (2016). Challenges with Work-Life Balance and Project Management. *Project Management World Journal*, 5(7), 1-7.
- Braun, V. &. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2,, 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Browning, D. (2018). Self-Leadership: Why it Matters. 9 (2), 5. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Volume 9, Number 2, 14-18.
- Bryman, A. (2020). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder. Upplaga 3*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Cambridge University Press. (2022). Hämtat från Cambridge Dictionary:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/perception>
- Carmeli, A. M. (2006). Self-Leadership skills and innovative behaviour at work. *International Journal of Manpower*, 27(1), 75-90.
- Cashman, K. (2017). Deepening Authenticity for Sustainable Leadership: How to build self-awareness so your beliefs, values, principles, and behaviors line up. *Leadership Excellence*. November 2017, Vol. 34 Issue 11, 38-39.

- Castellano, S. C. (2021). Impact of self-leadership and shared leadership on the performance of virtual R&D teams. *Journal of Business Research*. May 2021, Vol. 128, 578-586.
- Delisle, J. (2020). Working time in multi-project settings: How project workers manage work overload. *International Journal of Project Management*., 38(7), 419-428.
- Denscombe, M. (2016). *Forskningshandboken: För småskaliga forskningsprojekt inom samhällsvetenskaperna*. (3, reviderad och uppdaterad upplaga). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Dishon, N. O. (2017). The Effect of Trait Self-Awareness, Self-Reflection, and Perceptions of Choice Meaningfulness on Indicators of Social Identity within a Decision-Making Context. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1-11. doi:doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02034
- Dondi, M. K. (2021). McKinsey Global Institute: These are the skills you will need for the future of work. *World Economic Forum*. *weforum.org*, 25 June 2021.
- Edmonson, A. (2013). Teaming is a Verb. *Reflections*, 13(1), 43-47.
- Gander, F. G. (2020). The Relationships of Team Role- and Character Strengths-Balance with Individual and Team-Level Satisfaction and Performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1-15.
- Geoghegan, L. &. (2008). Do Project Managers' Leadership Competencies Contribute to Project Success? *Project Management Journal*, 39(4), 58-67.
doi:doi.org/10.1002/pmj.20084
- Goleman, D. B. (2013). *Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Hagemann, B. &. (2019). The Mentally Prepared Leader. Cognitive Readiness- A higher - level critical thinking skill- is the new must-have. *TD*, 1-6.

- Hansen, M. &. (2016). Collective Intelligence in Project Groups: Reflections from the Field. .
Procedia Computer Science 100, 840-847.
- IPMA. (2022). *IPMA*. Hämtat från <https://www.ipma.world/>
- Jansson, T. &. (2017). *Individer, grupper och ledarskap i projekt. Andra upplagan*. Lund:
Studentlitteratur.
- Johnsson, C. (2021). *Self-leadership - a mosaic of meaning for learning and innovation. You
are important! A qualitative study of the phenomenon of self-leadership*. Kalmar:
Linné University.
- Karlsen, J. &. (2020). A study of the influence of project managers' signature strengths on
project team resilience. *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*,
26(3/4), 247-262.
- Kumar, S. &. (2014). Managing Self for Leadership. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*,
39(3), 138-142. doi: 10.4103/0970-0218.137148
- Lawrence, E. D.-S. (2018). Developing leadership potential in graduate students with
assessment, self-awareness, reflection, and coaching. *Emerald Insight*, 634-651.
- Lee, M. (2009). E-ethical leadership for virtual project teams. *International Journal of Project
Management*, 27(5), 456-463. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2008.05.012>
- Luft, J. (1963). *Group processes. An introduction to group dynamics. Third Edition*. Palo
Alto: National Press Books.
- Manz, C. C. (1986). Self-Leadership: Toward and Expanded Theory of Self-Influence
Processes in Organizations. *Academy of Management Review*. Vol. 11, No. 3, 585-600.
- Maqbool, R. S. (2017). The Impact of Emotional Intelligence, Project Managers'
Competencies, and Transformational Leadership on Project Success: An Empirical

Perspective. *Project Management Journal*, 48(3), 58-75.

doi:doi.org/10.1177/875697281704800304

Mayfield, J. M. (2021). Speaking to the Self: How Motivating Language Links with Self-Leadership. *International Journal of Business Communication*, vol. 58 (1), 31-54.

Moran, D. J. (2011). ACT for Leadership: Using Acceptance and Commitment Training to Develop Crisis-Resilient Change Managers. *The International Journal of Behavioural Consultation and Therapy*, 7(1), 66-75.

Muthusamy, S. S. (2005). Self-managing work teams: Enhancing organizational innovativeness. *Organizational Development Journal*., 23(3), 53-66.

Neck, C. M. (2019). *Self-Leadership: The Definite Guide to Personal Excellence. 2nd Edition*. Los Angeles and London.: Sage Publication.

Northouse, P. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice, Ninth Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Orth, U. &. (2014). The Development of Self-Esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 381-387. doi: 10.1177/0963721414547414

Parakhina, V. B. (2019). Self-Leadership and leadership: the relationship of concepts. *Advances in Social Science. Education and Humanities Research, Volume 318*, 34-40.

Sampietro, M. (2015). Project Managers: A Team Members' Perspective. *PM World Journal Project Managers*, 4 (7), 1-14. Hämtat från www.pmworldjournal.net.

Stewart, G. L. (2019). Self-Leadership: A Paradoxal Core of Organizational Behaviour. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour*, 6(1), 47-67. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012218-015130

- Unsworth, K. &. (2012). Help yourself: The mechanisms through which self-leadership intervention influences strain. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 17, 235-245.
- Van Dorssen, P. d. (2020). Self-Leadership Among Healthcare Workers: A Mediator for the Effects of Job Autonomy on Work Engagement and Health. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1-13.
- Vetenskapsrådet. (2002). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet.
- Wenell, T. (2014). *Projektleadership*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Wisniewski, B. Z. (2020). The Power of Feedback Revisited: A Meta-Analysis of Educational Feedback Research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1-14. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.03087
- Zuckerman, J. F. (2018). Self-Awareness: The Ladder to Leadership Success. *Chief Learning Officer*. March 2018, Vol. 17 Issue 2, 16-19.
- Åkerlund, D. (2017). *Guide till akademiskt skrivande. Om att skriva rapporter, uppsatser och självständiga skriftliga arbeten på universitet och högskolor. Upplaga: 2.0*. Hämtat från <https://dan.aakerlund.org/akademiskt-skrivande>

Appendix 1: Information letter to respondents

Dear XX,

My name is Malin Ahlén and I am currently studying a master's Programme in Project Management at Karlstad University Business School in Sweden. I recently started my master's thesis, and I am now looking for respondents who want to participate in interviews for my research.

The purpose of my study is to examine the concept of self-leadership.

The interview takes about one hour and will be completed digitally through Zoom or a digital meeting tool that works for you.

To participate in the study, you currently must work or have worked as a Project Manager within an authority, organization, or company and have experience of self-leadership.

Your personal data will be processed according to your consent.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can, whenever you want, withdraw your consent without giving a reason, which does not affect the processing that took place before your withdrawal.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

All information will be anonymized in the thesis.

All data that is available to us is processed in such a way that no unauthorized persons can access it. The data will be retained until the thesis work has been approved and the grade has been registered in Karlstad University's study register and then destroyed.

Karlstad University is a data controller. According to the Personal Data Act (Data Protection Regulation as of 25 May 2018), you have the right to access all data about you that is handled free of charge and, if necessary, to have any errors corrected. You also have the right to request deletion, restriction, or object to the processing of personal data, and it is possible to lodge a complaint with the Swedish Data Protection Authority. Contact details of the Data Protection Officer at Karlstad University are dpo@kau.se.

Thank you for being part of my research!

Kind Regards,
Malin Ahlén

My contact details:

Email:

Phone nr:

Contact details of supervisors:

Henrik Bergman (Programme Manager)

Johan Netz

Tomas Gustavsson

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Consent to participate in this study in Project Management for a master’s thesis on self-leadership. I have been informed in writing about the study and agree to participate. I am aware that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can cancel my participation in the study without giving any reasons. My signature below means that I can choose to participate in the study and agree that Karlstad University processes my personal data in accordance with current data and protection legislation and information provided. A digital consent via email works just as well as a written one on paper.

Signature.....

Name Clarification

Place and Date.....

Contact details Malin Ahlén:

Email:

Phone nr:

Contact details of supervisors:

Henrik Bergman (Programme Manager)

Johan Netz

Tomas Gustavsson

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

This interview Guide was based on earlier interview guides and research within similar studies, for instance Houghton et al (2002), to be able to thematize and analyse the answers.

When necessary, follow-up questions were asked to clarify or deepen an answer such as for example:

- Would you like to expand on this question or say something else about this?
- Could you give me an example?
- Did I understand you correctly?

Introductory questions / background information:

1. Which is your ... current position d) Number of years in this position e) Number of years as a Project Manager f) Company/organization g) *Optional: Educational background*

General

2. How do you do to lead yourself in everyday life? Could you give me some examples?
3. What is the biggest benefit of leading yourself you think?
4. What is the biggest challenge?
5. When did you first hear the expression self-leadership? What did you think /feel about it?
6. Do you have support when leading yourself? If not, would you like to have support?
7. How would you define self-leadership?

Tools and methods

8. Which tools or methods are there to lead yourself? Please give examples.
9. How did these tools or methods work for you initially? Are there some methods or tools that you have discarded or developed?

Self-leadership among Project Managers

10. What is your impression: Is it common to use self-leadership among project managers?
11. Do you think self-leadership can be the most beneficial for
 - a) the project manager him/herself?
 - b) project success?
 - c) the success of the team?How? Why/Why not?
12. Do you think leading yourself will become more important in the future for project managers? Why/why not?
13. If you held a course in self-leadership for project managers who have no experience with this, what would you first advise them to do?